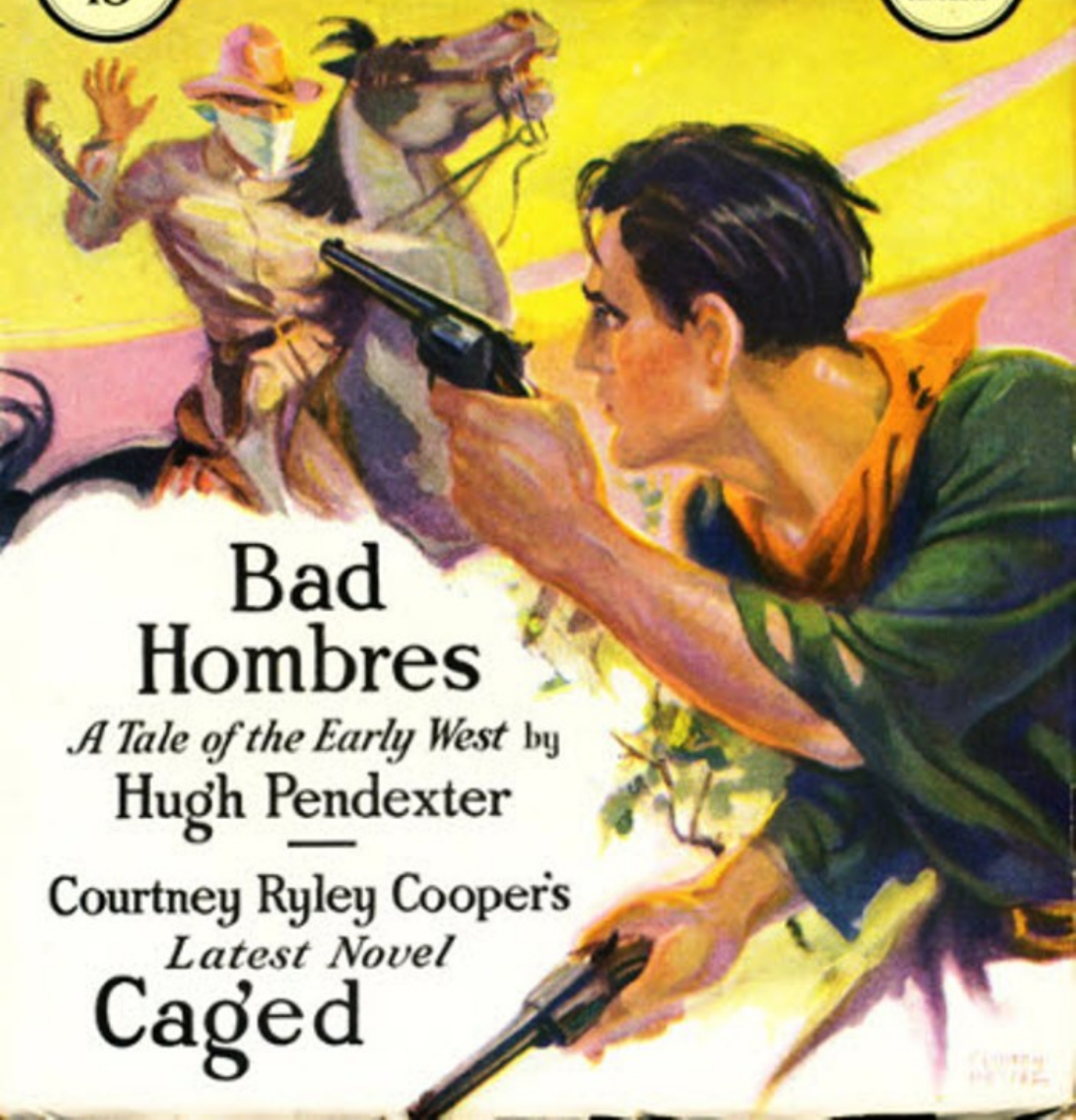
Action Stories of Every Variety

ARGOSY

ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

MARCH 15

10¢ Canada 15¢



Bad Hombres

A Tale of the Early West by Hugh Pendexter

—

Courtney Ryley Cooper's *Latest Novel*

Caged

Muscles 5¢ apiece!

WOULDN'T it be great if we could buy muscles by the bag — take them home and paste them on our shoulders? Then our rich friends with money to buy them sure would be socking us all over the lots.

But they don't come that easy, fellows. If you want muscle you have to work for it. That's the reason why the lazy fellow never can hope to be strong. So if you're lazy and don't want to work—you had better quit right here. This talk was never meant for you.

I Want Live Ones

I've been making big men out of little ones for over fifteen years. I've made pretty near as many strong men as Heinz has made pickles. My system never fails. That's why I guarantee my works to do the trick. That's why they gave me the name of "The Muscle Builder."

I have the surest bet that you ever heard of. Eugen Sandow himself said that my system is the shortest and surest that America ever had to offer.

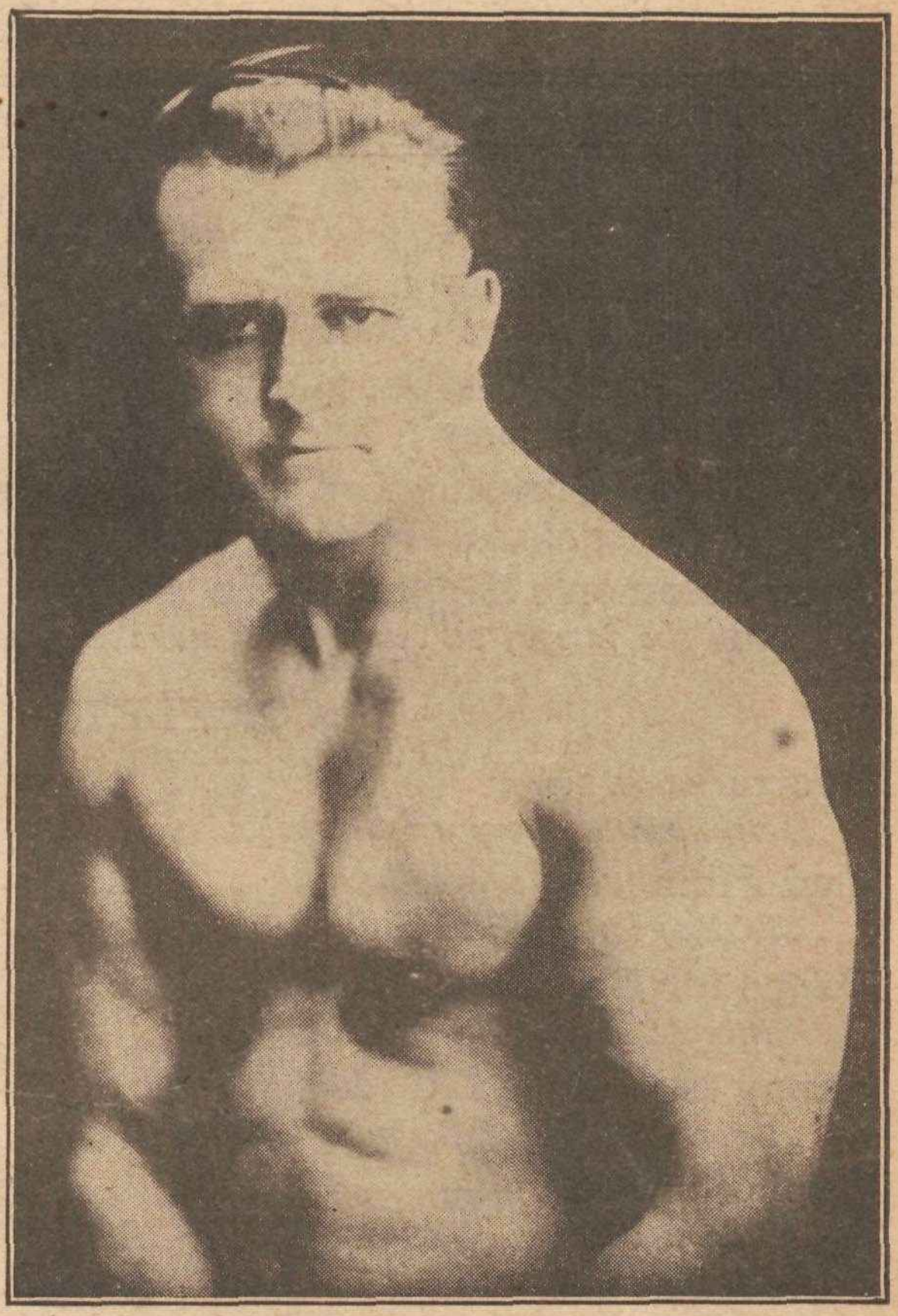
Follow me closely now and I'll tell you a few things I'm going to do for you.

Here's What I Guarantee to Do For You

In just 30 days I'm going to increase your arm one full inch. Yes, and add two inches to your chest in the same length of time. But that's nothing I've only started; get this—I'm going to put knobs of muscles on your shoulders like baseballs. I'm going to deepen your chest so that you will double your lung capacity. Each breath you take will flood every crevice of your pulmonary cavity with oxygen. This will load your blood with red corpuscles, shooting life and vitality throughout your entire system. I'm going to give you arms and legs like pillars. I'm going to work on every inner muscle as well, toning up your liver, your heart, etc. You'll have a snap to your step and a flash to your eye. You'll feel the real pep shooting up and down your old backbone.

You'll stretch out your big brawny arms and crave for a chance to crush everything before you. You'll just bubble over with vim and animation.

Sounds pretty good, what? You can bet your old ukulele it's good. It's wonderful. And don't forget, fellow—I'm not just promising all this—I guarantee it. Well, let's get busy. I want some action—So do you.



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Send For My New 64 Page Book "Muscular Development"

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Take your pen or pencil and fill out the coupon, or even your name and address on a postal will do—do it now before you turn this page.

Earle Liederman

Dept. 1103, 305 Broadway, New York City

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Dept. 1103, 305 Broadway, New York City

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Name..... Age.....

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City..... State.....

ARGOSY

ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

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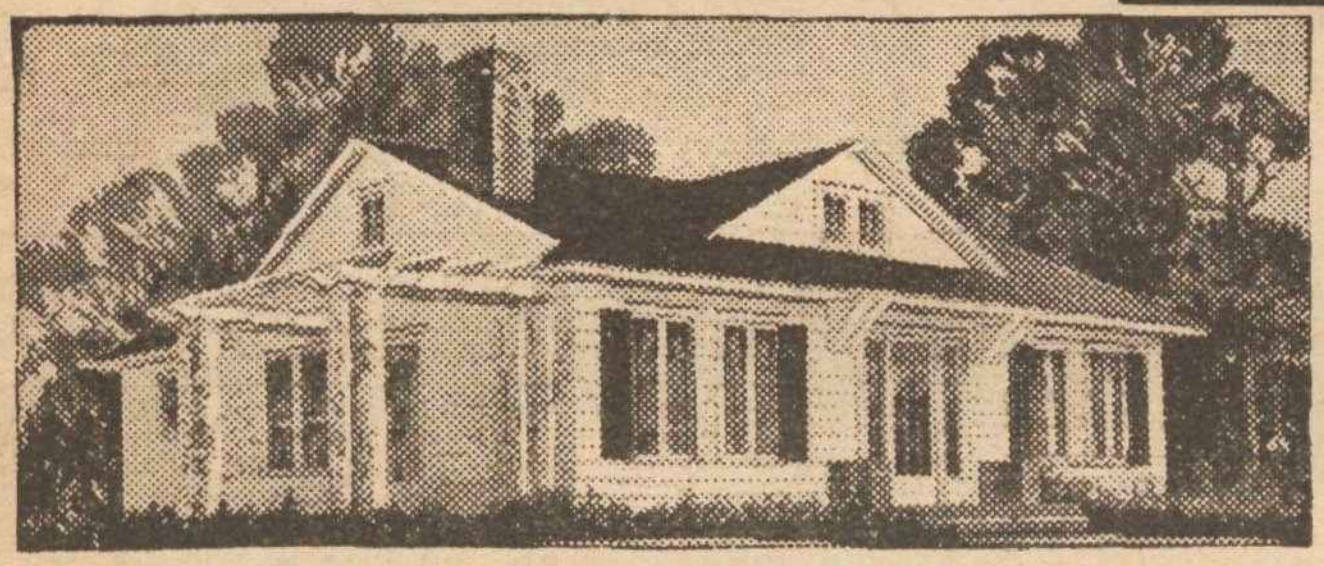
$500.00 GIVEN!

We Will Pay $500.00 Cash For the Most Suitable Name For This Beautiful Six-Room House



ANY NAME MAY WIN!

Offer open to everybody. Nothing to buy or sell. No Obligation.

WHOEVER SENDS THE MOST SUITABLE NAME WILL WIN $500.00—NOTHING ELSE TO DO!

This is a new Colonial Bungalow—cozy, convenient—yet a roomy house. It is meeting with such popularity that we are desirous of obtaining a suitable name for it for use in connection with our building program, and will pay $500.00 cash for the most suitable name suggested. There are no strings tied to this offer. Sending us a name for this house does not obligate you in any way. Nothing to buy or sell. We merely want a suitable name and are willing to pay $500 in cash for the best one sent in.

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Surely you can think of an appropriate name for such a beautiful home. Do not use more than two words. Any word or words may be used or any combination of words, such as Ridgelawn, Shadynook, Hearthome, or names like Sunshine Inn, Journey's End, etc. No matter how simple your suggestion is, you cannot afford to neglect sending it in at once. Any name may win. Possibly you may have the most suitable name right on the end of your tongue this minute. If you have, send it in at once, and $500 in cash is yours.

$100.00 Extra for Promptness

We want the name for this house quickly, and are going to pay the winner an extra $100.00 cash just for promptness—or a total of $600.00 in all. See coupon below. Send your suggestion today!

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This offer is open to everyone, excepting members of this firm, its employees and relatives. Each participant may send only one name. Sending two or more names will cause all names submitted by that person to be thrown out. Contest closes June 28, 1930. Should two or more persons submit an equally suitable name for this house, the full amount of the prize offered will be paid to each one so tying. To win the $100.00 CASH PROMPTNESS PRIZE, the winning name must be mailed within three (3) days after this announcement is read. This $100.00 CASH PROMPTNESS PRIZE will be added to the $500.00 prize and paid to each one submitting the winning name, provided suggestion is mailed within three (3) days after this announcement is read. See coupon—act quick!

FREE! In appreciation of your suggesting a name for this house real quickly, we will send you FREE and POSTPAID, the floor plans and blue print of this beautiful house. Understand, this does not obligate you in any way. Fill out and mail the coupon, or a copy of it, TODAY—QUICK! ANY NAME MAY WIN.

HOME BUILDERS' SOCIETY
2833 Lincoln Way, Batavia, Illinois

Enclosed with this coupon on separate sheet is my suggestion for a name.

Date this offer was read.....

Date my suggestion is mailed.....

My Name .....

Address .....

Town .....

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INVENTORS: WE HAVE BEEN IN BUSINESS 30 YEARS. IF YOUR INVENTION OR PATENT HAS MERIT, SEND DETAILS OR MODEL, OR WRITE ADAM FISHER MFG. CO., 249 ENRIGHT, ST. LOUIS, MO.

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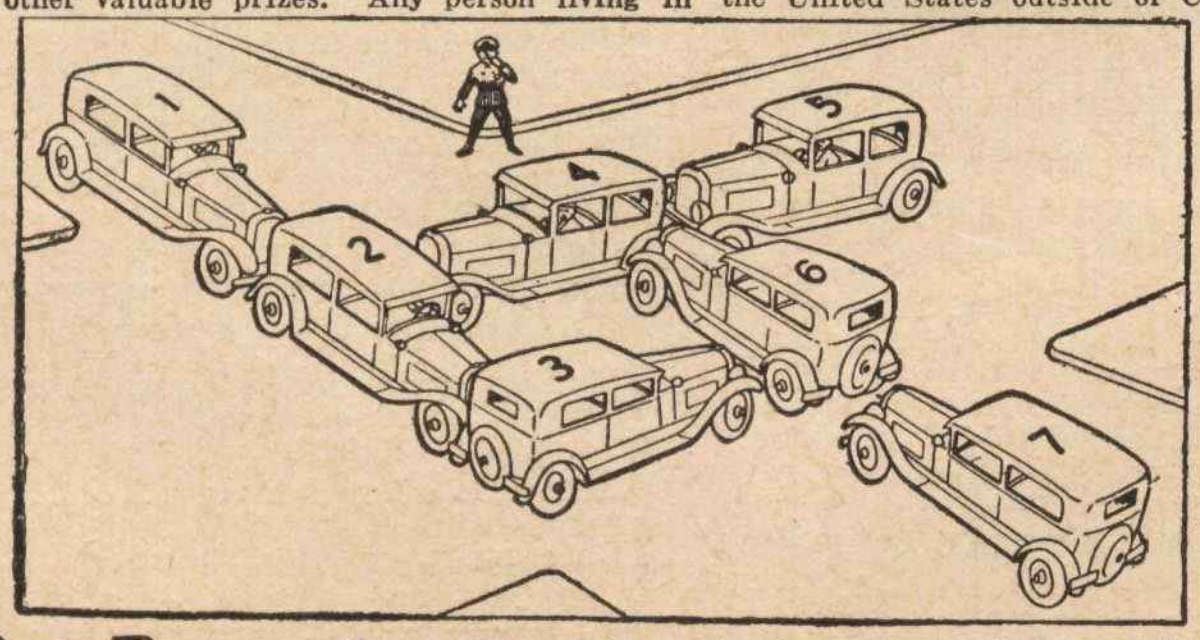
Seven Brand New 6-Cylinder Cars Given

For advertising purposes I am going to give absolutely free a brand new six-cylinder "Special Six" Nash four-door Sedan, an Oldsmobile two-door Sedan, a De Soto two-door Sedan, a Pontiac two-door Sedan, an Essex two-door Sedan, a Whippet two-door Sedan, and a Chevrolet two-door Sedan, all six-cylinder latest model Sedans; also 4 splendid new console type radios, a Victor Orthophonic Victrola and other valuable prizes. Any person living in the United States outside of Chicago may enter an answer to this puzzle except employees of the W. D. Boyce Company or members of their families, or winners of automobiles or first prizes in any of our previous offers, or members of their families.

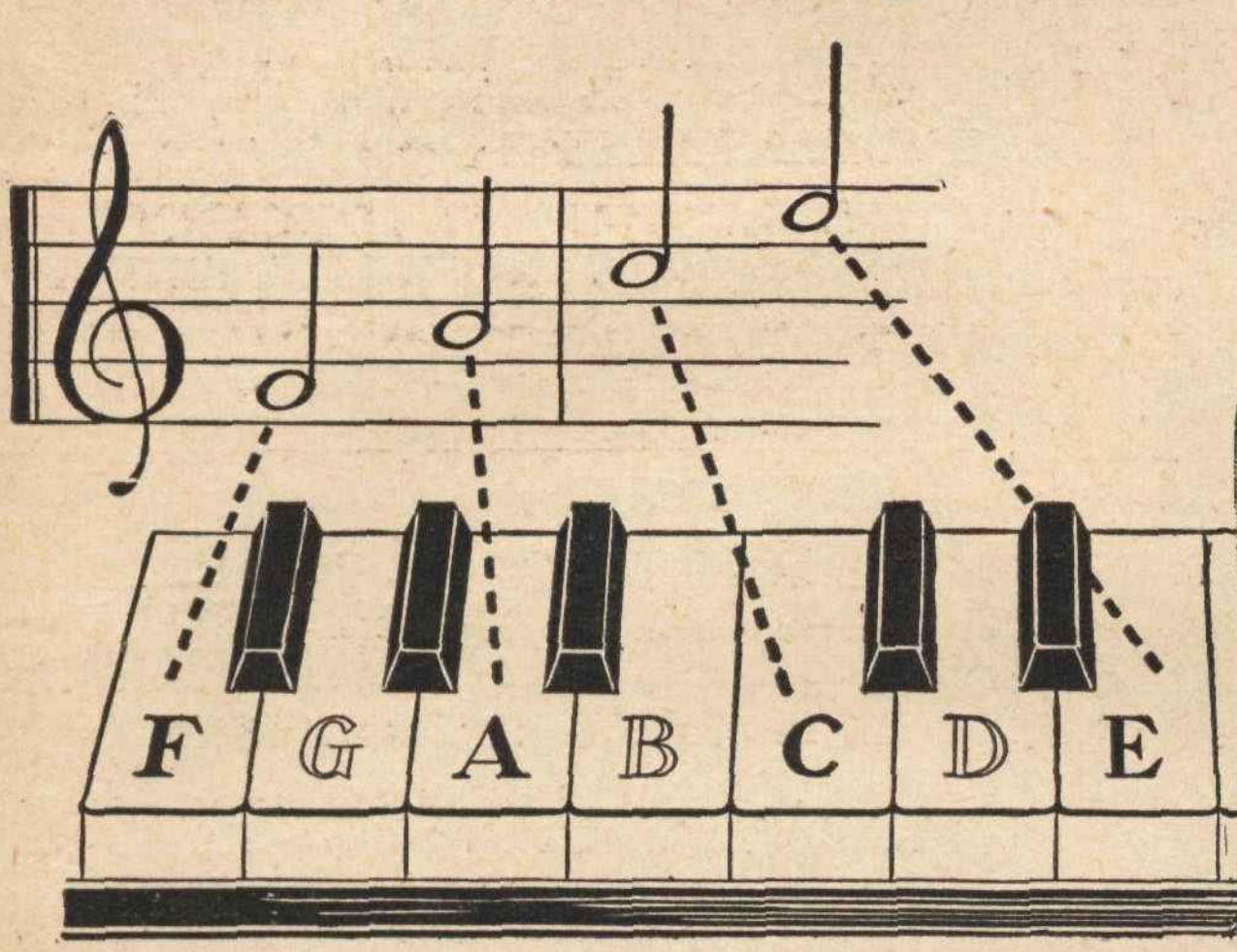
Solve This Traffic Puzzle



In the picture there are 7 cars in a bad traffic jam. None of them can move forward, for each car is blocked by the one in front of it. One of these cars will have to be backed out. Which one? The traffic policeman seems to be stumped. Can you straighten up this tangle for him? Only one car may be moved backward, and if you pick out the right one, you will see that it is not necessary to back up any of the others. Send the number of the car which when backed out will relieve this traffic tie-up, and if your answer is correct you will be qualified for this opportunity.

$500.00 for Promptness We are not only giving the Sedans, radios and so forth in our big prize list amounting to over $6,800.00, but are also giving an additional $500.00 in cash for promptness to the winner of first prize if he or she has been prompt. Thus, the first prize winner will receive the Nash Sedan and $500.00 in cash, or $1,845.00. Find the car which when backed out will relieve this traffic tangle and send the number of it in a letter or on a post card, or you can mark the car on the picture and send it to me. Be sure to write or print your name and address plainly. All who answer correctly can share in the prizes or cash. Duplicate prizes paid in case of ties. ANSWER TODAY. Free Prize Judge, Dept. 547, 510 N. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

To those who think Learning Music is hard-



PERHAPS *you* think that taking music lessons is like taking a dose of medicine. It isn't any longer!

As far as you're concerned, the old days of long practice hours with their horrid scales, hard-work exercises, and expensive personal teachers' fees are over and done with.

You have no excuses—no alibis whatsoever for not making your start toward musical good times *now!*

For, through a method that removes the boredom and extravagance from musical lessons, you can now learn to play your favorite instrument entirely at home—without a private teacher—in half the usual time—at a fraction of the usual cost.

Just imagine...a method that has made the reading and playing of music so downright simple that you don't have to know one note from another to begin.

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Soon when your friends say "please play something," you can surprise and entertain them with pleasing melodies on your favorite instrument. You'll find yourself in the spotlight—popular everywhere. Life at last will have its silver lining and lonely hours will vanish as you play the "blues" away.

New Friends. Better Times

If you're tired doing the heavy looking-on at parties—if always listening to others play has almost spoiled the pleasure of music for you—if you've been envious because they could entertain their friends and family—if learning music has always been one of those never-to-come-true dreams, let the time-proven and tested homestudy method of the U. S. School of Music come to your rescue.

Don't be afraid to begin your lessons at once. Over half a million people learned to play this modern way—and found it easy as A-B-C. Forget that old-fashioned idea that you need special "talent." Just read the list of instruments in the panel, decide which one you want to play, and the U. S. School of Music will do the rest. And bear in mind no matter which instrument you choose, the cost in each case will average the same—just a few cents a day. No matter whether you are a mere beginner or already a good performer, you will be interested in learning about this new and wonderful method.

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Read the list of instruments to the left, decide which you want to play, and the U. S. School of Music will do the rest. Act NOW. Clip and mail this coupon today, and the fascinating Free Book and Free Demonstration Lesson will be sent to you at once. No obligation. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 1033 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

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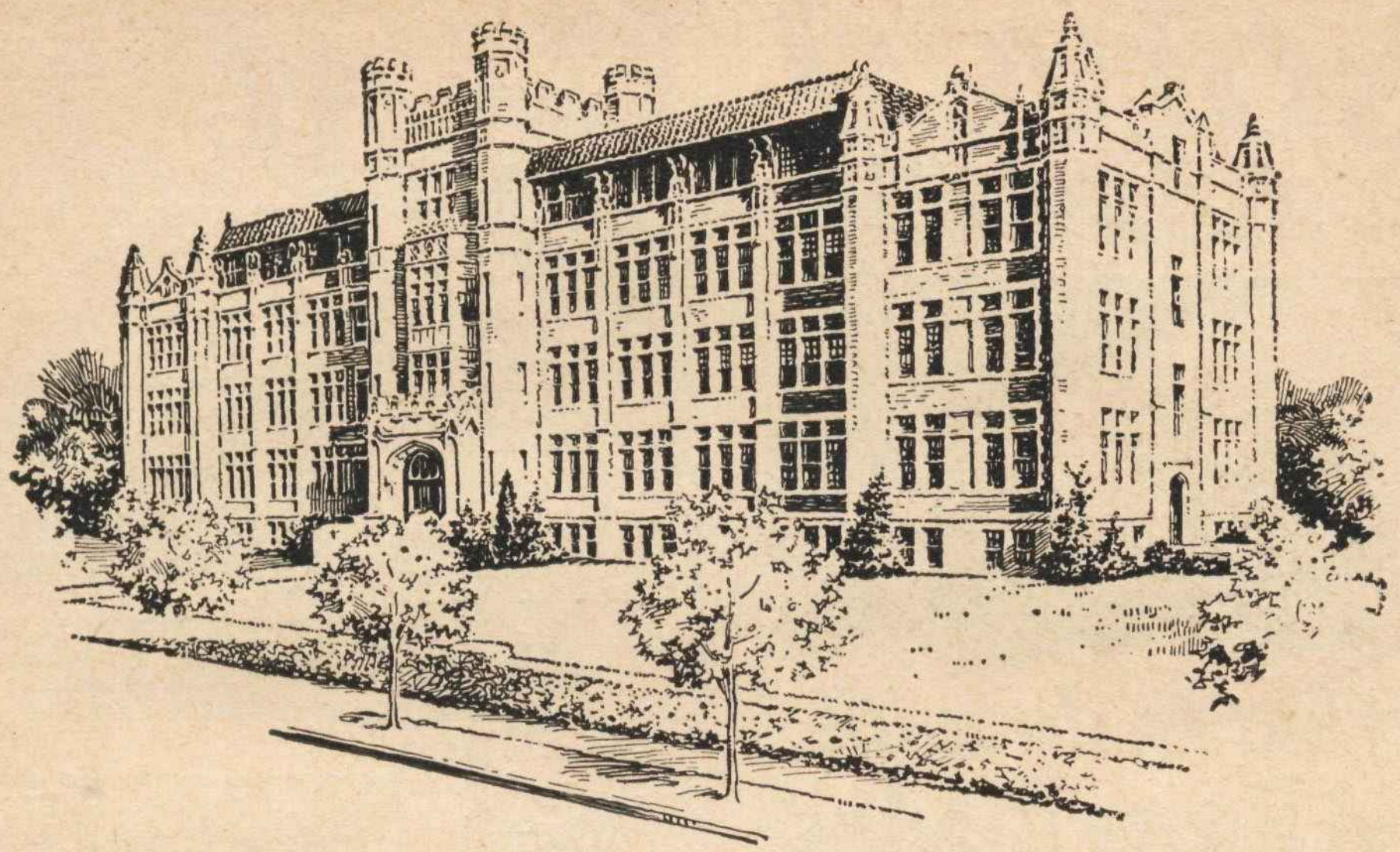

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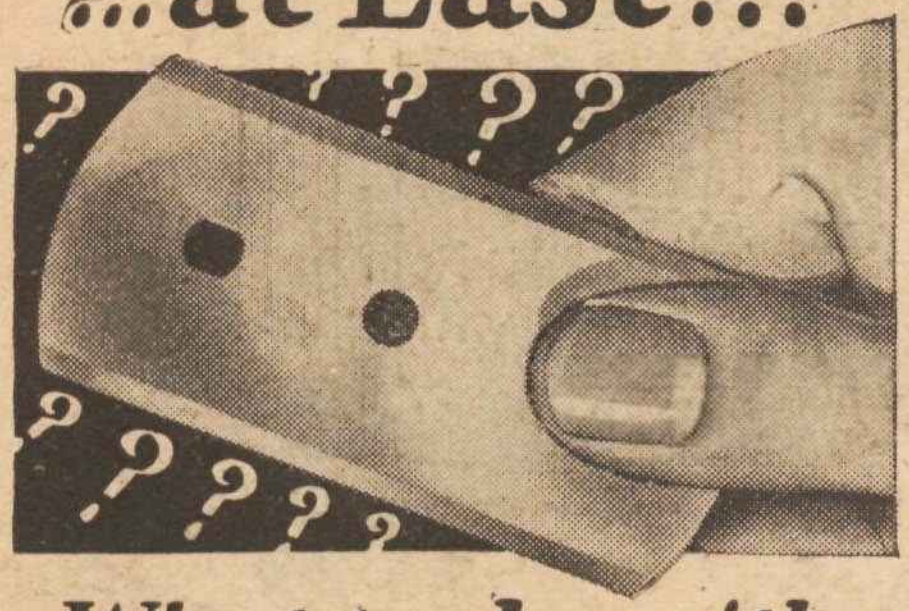

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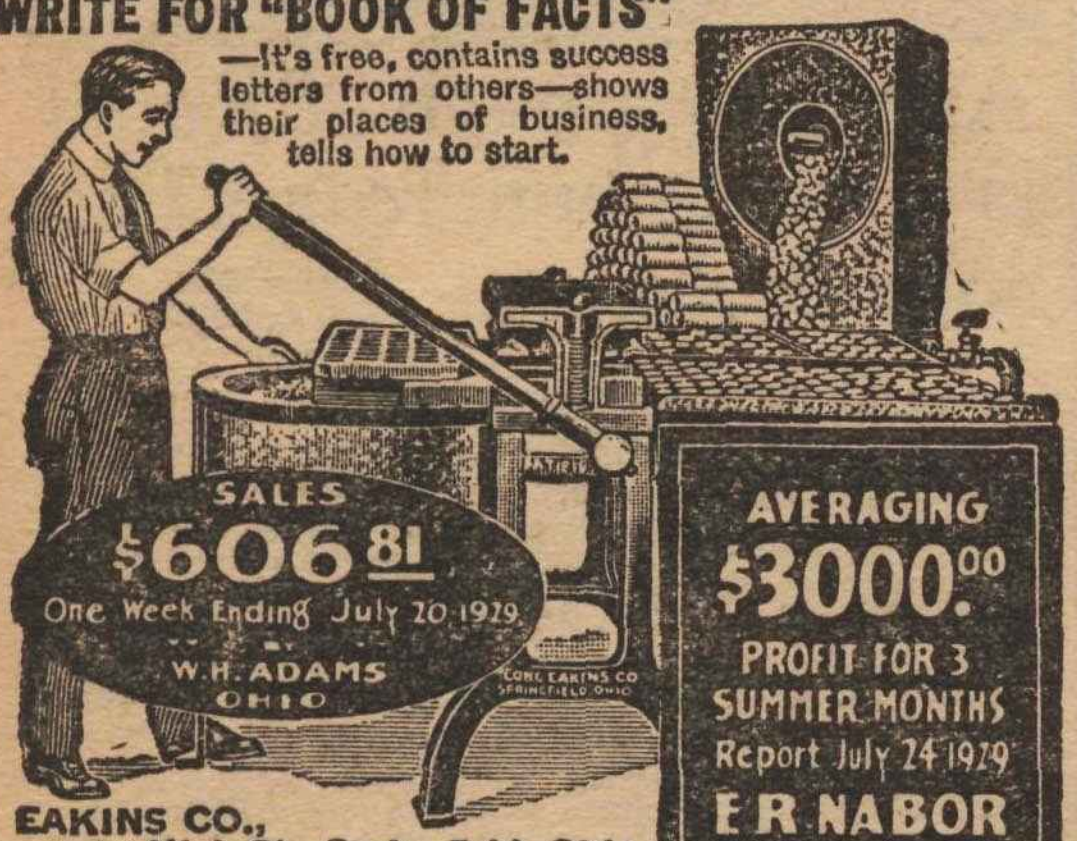

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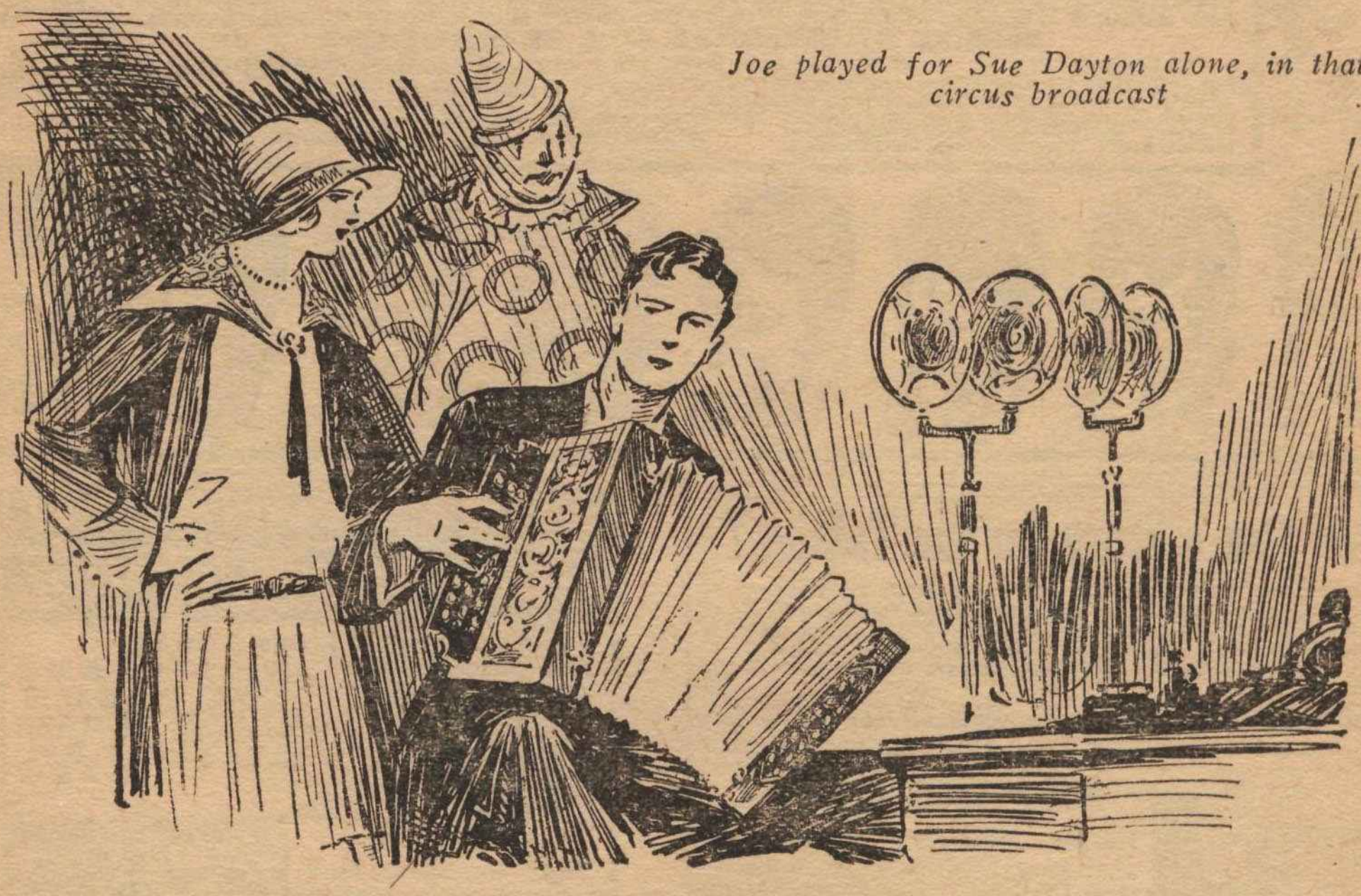


Joe played for Sue Dayton alone, in that circus broadcast

Caged

Joe Barry was a captive of the city he had tried to conquer; nor could he guess the amazing turn his captivity was to take

By COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

CHAPTER I.

A PRISONER OF THE SLUMS.

THERE seemed to be a new, sullen note about the roar of the L trains that Joe Barry never before had heard. The cobblestones beneath that ancient, bellowing structure appeared slimier as he crouched behind a scaly iron pillar to let a truck rumble past. With a double glance, up and down the tunnel-gray recesses, he ran across the street car tracks to the protection of another pillar, huddled there, glanced swiftly again and leaped for the curbing. Joe Barry, a country lad at heart, hated New York.

There were reasons, of course. One of them made itself apparent in his clothing, much lighter in color and

weight at the elbows and knees than in the rest of its texture. His suit was that peculiarly colorless gray so often selected by those who purchase with the idea of durability paramount. His hat, also gray except for the dark marks of perspiration, had been out of shape long enough to assume a block of its own. His shoes were unshined, just as his suit long had been unpressed.

There was, however, a different bagginess about it from that of the clothing of other Third Avenue habitués. Theirs were out of shape merely from lack of the iron. Joe Barry's clothing possessed deep creases and manifold wrinkles; such imprints as could only result from having dried on the body after a thorough soaking.

In the young man's lapel buttonhole was the limp, discolored remains of a field flower. Crossing East Seventeenth Street before the traffic, he noticed the withered bloom and with a quick gesture, threw it away.

The movement was impulsive. The one which followed was equally so; Joe Barry turned his head for an instant and looked back to where the dead flower lay in the path of truck and taxi. It was only a glance, like some one saying good-by too awkwardly to show emotion. Then the young fellow hurried on again, dark eyes centered upon an objective halfway down the block.

AMISSHAPEN, three-story frame building stood there, its ill-painted clapboard front conferring a queer sort of comparative dignity to the dingy red-brick tenements which squeezed it from each side.

This old place had no placards in the windows. A second-hand store on the street level only added to its air of dishabille; a warped door at one side announced faintly the word: "Lodgings."

Into this doorway Joe Barry turned, and moved swiftly up the creaking stairway, halting, however, at the first landing. A dim figure had shown itself, groping about the dusky hallway.

"Where've you been?" the lodger complained. "A hell of a note this is —six o'clock and no beds made—"

Joe Barry's features took on a deeper tone of harassed grimness. "Oh, dry up!" he said in a tired voice.

Then he went to the third floor and unlocked the door leading to his mockery of a room—a frayed piece of dirty Chinese matting on the wide-cracked floor; a bed, such as it was; a washstand and its accouterments bearing the black check-marks of age. There was a chair, also, half hidden by a scant burden of clothing; and a bureau from which the veneering had ballooned in large patches. Once in the room, Joe Barry slumped to the bed, his features flaccid except for one particular, his eyes.

Dark, deep, wistfully alert, they stared beyond the tawdry things about him, as if looking upon vistas of glorious contentment. But after a time the look vanished. The eyes hardened, as if with protective intent. His hands, peculiarly fine-fingered for the breadth of them, went upward to an awkward smoothing of his dark hair.

Youth had departed in a sudden, maturing process which made even twenty-five an inadequate estimate of his age. Finally he rose.

"They'll all be squawking pretty soon," he mumbled. "I'd better snap into it."

He went down the steps then, after locking his room—mainly a gesture,

since it contained so little. Soon, to the complaints of the early arrivals, he was at his work—the cleaning up of the box-like rooms, a dab at sweeping, the making of cot-like beds.

This job was a side line which meant free lodging for looking after the twelve rooms which the rickety building contained. He was, in fact, a sort of agent, chambermaid, and scrub-man for a shiftless owner who never troubled himself to appear unless Joe should be late with his weekly collections. Then, a greasy, unkempt man would hobble over from his miserly quarters on East Fourteenth Street, cursing the unreliability of the present generation.

More roomers came home, stumbling up the worn steps, and instantly began their complaints. Joe Barry turned his head.

"Give a guy time!" he snapped.

"Time?" asked a protesting voice. "How much time do you want? These rooms ought to be made up by noon; you ain't even touched mine yet."

Another lodger joined the quarrel.

"You weren't here last night."

"Oh, yeah?" asked Joe Barry surlily.

"Oh, yeah! What a joint this is! A lousy miser for a landlord and an accordion player for a chambermaid!"

Then every one laughed, while Joe Barry stood and scowled, one hand beating slowly into the palm of the other. At last his shoulders slumped and he went silently back to his work, a silence which continued, in spite of complaining and of taunts, until his last job was done.

WITH a sudden new air of hurry, he went to his room, shaved with cold water, changed to the less shabby suit which hung over the chair, and drew from beneath the bed an oblong case of battered black. A moment later he was on the street, bound for his work of the night.

He walked; nickels were precious. Long ago, he had convinced himself that a walk from Third Avenue and Sixteenth Street to below Washington Square was good for a fellow. Sometimes he strolled, looking in windows. To-night, however, he all but ran; his arm ached from its burden and he was out of breath when at last he reached Louie Bertolini's Italian Restaurant, on the fringe of Greenwich Village.

A loose-featured waiter, slumped on his hips, hands limply clasped behind his back, rolled his eyes toward the stairs. Joe Barry knew him as Full-House. Sometimes they called him Kendall.

"Upstairs for you," he said. Then in reply to a swift question, "Louie? He ain't come in yet." At that he grinned. "You'll know when he gets here."

Joe nodded acknowledgment to the information and started toward a stairway leading from the main dining room. The place could be matched a thousand times in New York: made-over rooms from an old residence; small, square tables with imitation flowers in cheap vases on limp, damp linen; a telephone booth in the hallway. Joe Barry knew it so well that the slightest deviation was arresting; he halted at the stairway.

"When did he get the radio?" he asked.

"Las' night, when you never showed up," said Full-House, and on his flat feet, moved away. But Joe Barry remained at the bottom of the stairs, looking with something of fright at the unobtrusive brown cabinet and its connection wire, leading to a light

socket. The instrument was quietly prophetic.

A few persons were upstairs, and waiters moved abstractedly about. Louie Bertolini's restaurant was a straight joint; there was no incentive of liquor to promote the service derived from heavy tips. Joe Barry made his way hastily to an old storeroom at the rear and opened the black box. An accordion, of the cheapest professional kind, lay within. He brought it forth and bent to receive its strap. Then he went forth to his job of the night, "playing the tables."

It was only ordinary music, accomplished without interest and received in the same manner. No one looked up, no one applauded; Joe Barry, with his tired features and the grim lines at the corners of his lips, was merely a part of the place, to be accepted along with the damp linen and imitation flowers as a penalty for the cheapness of the fare.

He played softly. Sometimes he played so softly that the tones could not be heard above the conversation and clatter of dishes. At such moments he seemed to forget his surroundings and a wistful light would come to his eyes.

Often, too, during these abstracted periods, such waiters as were idle would saunter closer and listen with idly cocked heads to a sort of music different from Joe's usual offerings. It was only temporary; there was a noise from downstairs which needed drowning, the insistent voice of the radio. After a time, however, it ceased, and Full-House shuffled up the stairs.

"Come on down," he commanded, "the radio's gone blooey."

Joe Barry obeyed wordlessly. The lower restaurant was crowded now. Louis had arrived and was talking noisily in his cubbyhole of an office.

After a long time the customers thinned. There was only a party of four stringy-haired women from Greenwich Village at the round center table, and a quietly dressed man who dropped in now and then. Joe noticed that he sat, as usual, at a little table in the right-hand corner of the room where his back would be to the wall and his eyes toward the door.

Joe Barry had thought nothing of that; the table was there; many persons sat at it. The entertainer's only interest, in fact, had been primarily that this man seemed different from the usual clientele. It had deepened, however, one night when, on departing, the man had given him a dollar. But he had not been back since, until tonight.

The entertainer looked in his direction and, smiling, started toward him —the advances that a friendless dog or a friendless human instinctively makes toward any one who even pretends a kindness.

JUST then the radio responded to the tinkering of Full-House; and as if on signal, Louie Bertolini, shiny-haired, dumpy, his short arms swinging out from his wide girth, his short legs striding rapidly, came from his office.

"So you came back, huh?" he asked choppily. "After you get over your drunk, you come back to Louie!"

Barry's lips tightened.

"You know I don't drink," he said.

"I know what they tell Full-House at the rooming place. I know you weren't here. I know you did not send me some word, you did not say: 'I am sorry, I am sick, get another boy, kiss my foot!' Where did you go?"

Joe Barry swung his accordion to a chair.

"Up by Newburgh. You wouldn't understand."

"You should want I wouldn't understand! Why you should go by Newburgh?"

Joe fumbled at the accordion strap.

"Well, it's spring, if you've got to know."

"And what of it? I should believe that! Where did you stay?"

Joe Barry tightened his lips.

"You wouldn't understand that either. I slept in a haystack."

Louie Bertolini opened wide his mouth, and made clawing motions at his slick hair.

"Am I a fool?" he asked. "You slept in a haystack? You were out here in New York with a cheecken, and you come back and tell me funny stories."

The young man scowled.

"I've told you the truth!" he snapped. "I know where I was. I can take you to a man who saw me, a farmer. I tried to stay all night at his place. He'll remember me. I guess I could find the farm," came after a pause. "It was somewhere below Orrs Mills; there was a truck turned over on a side road about a mile above it. I could go by that."

"Ha, ha!" said Louie Bertolini. It wasn't a laugh—it was merely the two ejectives uttered without expression. "I should go clear up to Newburgh to find out if you asked somebody to stay all night....I should get along without crazy people!" he added after an instant. Then he pattered away. "Go wherever you pliss after to-night; I've got a radio." Then over his shoulder: "Come back Saturday and get your pay."

There was no answer to make. There was nothing to do. The four stringy-haired women were leaving their table; the man in the corner had asked for his check. Joe looked in his direction and forced a broken smile.

"I guess that's that," he said. The man smiled in return, then raised his brows sharply. Joe obeyed the summons, as the diner surveyed the room quickly, with a seemingly casual glance of his dark blue eyes.

"Broke?"

"Yes, sir; flat."

"It's tough." He chewed at his lower lip. Then he leaned closer. "Tell you what you do. Be at Christopher Street and Seventh Avenue in an hour. Just stand on the corner. I'll pick you up in a car. We'll take a little ride together. It might be something that you can't afford to pass up."

"Yes, sir."

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE ESCAPE.

IT was some time after the machine had picked him up before Joe Barry could pull himself out of his daze. He had not expected a limousine and a chauffeur.

He hadn't noticed the car when it had pulled swiftly up to him where he waited, other than that it was big and rich and gleaming. Neither did he now notice that the rear curtain was pulled and that his benefactor sat well back in his side of the seat, so that no lights fell upon him from the street. For a time, there was silence. Then:

"Well, since we've got to get acquainted sooner or later, I'm an attorney. John B. Martin, 60 Wall Street."

"Yes, sir."

There was silence for a time. It was nearly midnight now; traffic was light. The car eased swiftly along Fifth Avenue, across Fifty-Ninth Street and into

the Park. Martin straightened, and leaned forward.

"Well, boy," he said, "been in New York long?"

"Yes, sir, three years. Anyway, it seems a long time."

"I guess that depends on how things break. Where'd you come from?"

"Missouri. Waverly; it's an old town on the River. My folks lived about four miles from there."

"Still live there?"

"No, sir. They're dead."

"Got lots of relatives around there? Most country people have."

Joe Barry shook his head.

"No, sir. We just sort of drifted. My dad was a farm tenant."

"And so, in a jam like you're in now—broke and out of a job—there's nobody you can really turn to. That it?"

"Yes, sir." Then suddenly: "I've kind of lost heart, here in New York."

"Got you whipped? Well, it's done a lot of them that way." At last: "Why did you come here, anyway?"

"I thought I'd set it on fire," Joe Barry said bitterly. The other man laughed.

"Didn't anybody tell you it was fireproof?"

"Everybody told me I could get rich here." Interest had loosed the gates of a taciturnity developed through the long knowledge that nobody cared and nobody wanted to know. "I used to play the accordion for dances around Waverly and everybody thought I was great. Finally it got so they didn't want the regular orchestra at all, just me. Then I sort of fixed up the dance hall, for special things, you know. I'd have a Halloween party with pumpkins and all that, and one for Christmas and New Year's and Valentine's.

"I kept saving and everything, and finally I got a forty-eight base accordion; that's a professional one. It's got a piano keyboard. But the real big ones, the kind they use on the stage, like Phil Baker, they use the hundred and twenty base—that's the little keys you work with your left hand. I can play that kind too."

"So they thought you were pretty good around Waverly," said the other man, shifting the subject from lengthy enthusiasm. "Then they kidded you into coming to New York; and when you got here, Broadway told you to go get a 'rep.' Is that it?"

"Yes, sir."

"I guess I know the rest; it's old stuff. Now you're out of a job. Nobody cares what happens to you. You don't care much yourself, do you?"

"No, sir."

"Then how would you like to get ten thousand dollars for a few years' work?"

JOE BARRY'S lips parted, but he said nothing. Even if he could have thought of something to say, there would not have been the power to utter it. Martin leaned closer.

"Ten grand, as they say on Broadway. All you've got to do is keep quiet and leave New York for a while."

"Where to?"

The man shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, up the river a piece, as you'd say in Missouri."

Joe Barry laughed. "That's what got me into trouble just now—going up the river a piece."

"Maybe it made you a lot of dough. How about that viewpoint? Had a good time, did you?"

"I sure did," Joe chuckled. "Every spring, I just think I'll go crazy here in town. So yesterday morning, I woke up early and I just didn't even stop to consider, I took all the money I had

and went out and caught a bus and got off somewhere up around Newburgh. I got away off on a side road, and found a crick there, and fooled around it until nearly dark. All of a sudden, a rain came up. Gee, I got soaked. It was kind of fun," he added. "Still, it got me to thinking about what I'd done."

"The wide open spaces didn't look so good, eh?"

"Oh, it would have been all right, except that it kept on raining. Well, I got under a tree and waited a long time until it stopped. Then I started out and got off on another side road. It must have been after midnight before I came back to the main highway. I guess there had been an accident. There were some red lights out and something that looked like a truck turned over."

"Anybody around to tell what happened?"

"I don't know. I thought afterward that maybe I should have gone up there, in case any one was hurt—still, they'd put out red lights, so people must have been there. I just kept on until I saw a light in a farmhouse and went up and asked if I could stay all night. The old fellow must not have liked my looks. He ran me away. So I sneaked over in a field and burrowed into a haystack."

"Come into town this morning?" asked Martin. The machine had started upon a second circle of Central Park.

"No, this afternoon. I must have been dog-tired; I slept until after one o'clock. Finally when I did come out, some fellows were in a field in a wagon. They yelled and started after me. I heard one of them shouting to the other about getting a gun, and calling the sheriff, so you bet I ran!" Joe Barry laughed. "I guess farmers in the East here are a lot different about people getting into their fields from what they are back home."

"Yes, I suppose so." Martin lit a cigarette, holding his hands carefully about the lighter. "Outran 'em, though?"

"Yes, sir. Easy. They didn't see me again after I ducked into a little grove. I caught the bus about four miles down the road." Joe Barry shifted suddenly. "But here I've been going on—"

"Quite all right. It was very interesting." Then, at quick variance, Martin asked: "I gather you haven't a sweetie here in New York?"

"No, sir."

"No girl you're crazy about, or one who is crazy about you?"

The young man laughed.

"No such luck, Mr. Martin. Why?"

"Just thought I'd ask." His voice became more crisp. "Now about my end of this affair. As I told you, I'm an attorney. Now and then I am called upon to represent persons who get into trouble. I have a case now. A young fellow I knew tried to beat the Jones Law—transporting liquor, you know."

"I don't fool around liquor much myself."

"So I gathered. That makes it all the better; a clean record, you know."

"Yes, sir?" said Joe hazily.

MARTIN went on:

"Naturally, my client doesn't care to suffer the penalties. It's largely a matter of circumstantial evidence. So we come to the point. How would you like to step into his shoes?"

There was a moment of waiting.

"I don't think I understand."

"Well, I don't know how to make it any plainer. You give up your free-

dom for a while—the Jones Law in itself, you know, isn't so bad. Courts have the right to use their discretion on first offenders; it's only the hard-boiled ones who get the maximum, five years, with time off for good behavior. My client can't afford to take the 'rap,' as they call it. You can. I'm offering you ten thousand dollars to do it."

"But I'd go to prison!" The youth's voice carried a tremor; Martin met it with matter-of-factness.

"All right," he answered. "We'll suppose that you go to prison. The only things prisons accomplish are to rob a man of his social position and his freedom to make a living, and give him a sense of shame. Think that over. You haven't any social position. Your freedom doesn't make any difference, because you're a prisoner anyway. Aren't you a prisoner?" he asked sharply. "Are you getting any sense of freedom out of this life you're living?"

"No, sir; it's just a bed and three meals a day."

"Then you're caged, in a way. There wouldn't be any shame, because a person must have something on his conscience before he can feel sorry for an act. You're innocent. That leaves one more point, the matter of income. Suppose you had to do two years. You'd have a roof over your head, three meals a day, comparatively kind treatment as long as you obeyed the rules, care in case of illness, the chance to play in the orchestra and be a trusty; and besides that, you'd have the knowledge that you were doing a job for which you were being paid nearly fourteen dollars a day, Sundays and holidays included."

Joe Barry felt suddenly dizzy.

"But how would I know—?"

"That you were to be treated squarely?" The man drew a hand from his pocket. "Lean forward and count that—there's enough light from the dash."

The dizziness increased. Joe Barry's fingers fumbled with the bills; his lips moved with audible undertones.

"Nine hundred and forty, nine-sixty, nine-eighty, a thousand."

"A FELLOW could do a lot with ten times that much money," the voice beside him was saying. "What's a few years anyway? You're only about twenty-five."

"But I wouldn't know what to do or say. I'd have to give myself up and say I'd done things that they could prove I didn't."

"Don't let that worry you. All you have to do is to refuse to answer any and all questions. That's no difficult job. Well," he asked quickly, "do you want to keep that money?"

Joe Barry rubbed a hand across his eyes.

"I don't know. I'd get everything balled up. Oh, it isn't that I care about the—the other!" he broke forth suddenly. "I'd as lief be dead as the way I've been going!"

"There you are. I'm handing you a chance to trade a few years for a good time all the rest of your life. Think it over."

"But—"

"Kid," the man leaned closer, "that word 'but' has licked more men than all the penitentiaries in the world. Can it. Look here," he said. "I'll give you to-night to think it over. Keep the money. Come to Louie's to-morrow at noon if you're going to be a welcher. If not, get yourself on a morning train and hop out of town for another day's good time. Just look the

country over and see if it isn't worth trading a few years for."

"Gee, I'd like to." Barry leaned forward, still fingering the bills. They were his if he wanted them. "But they'd raise the devil over at the house."

"The lodgers, you mean? I'll handle that. Got a pass-key, haven't you? Give it to me; I'll have the chauffeur drop by and fix up the place. Forget that part of it. You'll get your instructions when you come back from the country to-morrow night. Don't worry about that."

"But when should I be back?"

Martin's vague form moved jerkily—a shrugging of the shoulders.

"Suit yourself," he said. "Be back at your room some time around midnight. I'll probably be waiting for you. If I'm not there right on the dot, you'll hear from me within a few minutes."

AN hour later Joe Barry stood trembling in his gaslit room. One sweating hand was clasped about the heavy roll of bills in his trousers pocket. What were a few years to a young fellow? A person had to get a start in life somehow—and that would be better than half starving—half starving and being caged up here in the city, in a room like this!

A late L train roared past, shaking the old building. A truck clattered and back-fired on the cobblestoned street below. Joe Barry spread the certificates out before him, one beside the other, until they covered the entire center of his bed. There would be nine times this many more, put to his credit wherever he should say.

Ten thousand dollars would buy a little business, maybe a music store, and a home in some small town. Start him up in life where he could amount to something.

After a long time, he counted the bills again. Then, with a feeling of great riches, he extracted a hundred dollars and stuffed it into a pocket. Following this, he carefully slit the soggy mattress at a seam, tucked the rest of his fortune deep within the damp interior, sewed up the hole with a needle and thread from his bachelor's kit—and tried to sleep.

CHAPTER III.

BRIEF HOLIDAY.

MONEY had done its work by morning. Symbol though it might be of impending lack of freedom, it now held the lure of something exactly the opposite.

Just above the stratum of the "flop house" lies a plane of New York life in which anything out of the routine seldom happens. Joe Barry had led this sort of humdrum existence. He knew of the city's happenings only through the newspapers, and then with insufficient background to grasp them truly.

His ideas of penal institutions were still based upon these things as he knew them: the small jail in Waverly where the incarcerations of the town drunk were more a subject for laughter than anything else; the county institutions he had seen here and there.

These were places to be avoided, it is true, yet not imbued with the formidable aspects which a knowledge of a true prison can give one. Dannemora, Sing Sing—these were merely names, without giving anything to aid in their visualization.

Such thoughts, however, were not in Joe Barry's mind in detail. He only

knew that he was going to lose his identity for a few years in some sort of an institution, and that he was to be paid ten thousand dollars for it.

Joe had never before seen more than a hundred and fifty dollars at one time —that was when he had saved for three years to buy his accordion. Now he could call one thousand dollars his own, and there were nine thousand dollars more to come. He was rich!

It was with this feeling of wealth, bathing his brain with anæsthetic unguents, that he took an early train out of the city. A day out of town, to do as he pleased, with no thought of anything except that he was wealthy and free!

That was strange, he thought. Here he was, a fellow who had made a contract to go to prison, and because of that he was free! Free from the querulous demands of that dirty lodging house on Third Avenue, from the invectives of Louie, the uncomplimentary remarks of Full-House, and the apathy of diners, gobbling spaghetti.

Best of all he was free from fear, that gnawing sense of the ominous which every country boy has in New York—fear of traffic, fear of the noise, fear of the friendlessness and coldness, fear of actual hunger when a job has departed and days elapse before a fellow can stumble into another one.

Those contented souls who love to talk of New York as just a collection of little country towns have never come from an inland village, seeking its counterpart in a land of cement and steel and taxicabs.

BY noon, Joe Barry was eighty miles from New York in a Pennsylvania factory town. That is, in the physical sense. Mentally, he had crossed the continent—an entire sphere, in fact, to a new and utterly different life.

He went to the barber shop and for once did all the things he often had longed to do, from the bath onward to the last item upon the list of tonics and massages. Then had come a clothing store where Joe had bought recklessly; through his ideas of wealth were sufficiently warped to hold his purchases far within his resources.

At last everything else purchased, a different Joe Barry, newly if not stylishly dressed, alert, pleased with himself, the hard lines gone from the corners of his lips, paused in the fitting of a new hat.

"I thought I heard band music," he said to the clerk.

The salesman looked at his watch, then went to the door, leaning far out.

"The parade," he said on returning. "Late as usual. Ever see a circus parade on time?"

Joe Barry heard only two words.

"Circus parade!" he said and grinned. "Gee! A big circus?"

"Not so big. Dayton Brothers. Pretty good—at least, it was last year."

Joe Barry saw the fag end of the parade—small shows which exhibit in small towns have a privilege denied larger attractions these days. Cities and traffic killed the "grand, glittering pageant" several years ago. But this was not a city, and this was not a big show.

After Joe had eaten his luncheon he went out to the circus grounds. Free, a pocketful of money, new clothes, shoes that hurt a little, and a circus!

Three hours later he was still on the show grounds, merely wandering around. He had seen the big show, and the side show twice. Now it was simply a matter of making a lingering farewell.

This day seemed to have made him wholly naïve, as though the adulteration of the city had been utterly erased; he stopped to talk to canvasmen and roughnecks.

He peered into the wagons and wondered at the mystery of a circus, coming out of the night to transform a vacant lot into a wonderland, then disappearing into the shadows, leaving only the bare circle-marks of the rings and a litter of empty peanut sacks to prove its actuality.

He gawked at the portable electric light plant, chortling busily in a red wagon; he listened to the post-matinée ballyhoo on the kid show platform, and to the gruff roarings of the animals in the menagerie tent.

At last he paused before a small tent, set apart from the dressing tent proper, looking down with sudden longing upon a glittering thing which rested upon a chair there.

"Gee!" he said at last. "It's an Iorio!"

After a time, he glanced about, like a boy about to go under a fence to an apple orchard. Then he leaned forward and touched it.

"Gee!" he said again in an awe-struck whisper.

It was the first time he had ever seen one outside of a music store show-window. There were mother of pearl base-keys. The sides were of silver-stone celluloid, reflecting in the late afternoon sun with bursts of kaleidoscopic colors. The bellows were of milk-white kid.

Again Joe Barry glanced about him, then impulsively picked up the instrument to run his fingers over the piano keyboard and to tap the tiny mother-of-pearl proturberations which denoted that it was indeed a "hundred and twenty base."

Temptation was strong. At last he yielded.

HE used the bellows softly, surreptitiously, as if he were actually stealing the melody. A truly professional instrument like this had figured in many a dream of Joe Barry's; the music of true steel-reeds, the soft action of delicately balanced piano keys, the instant response to pressure.

Unconsciously his fingers played more swiftly upon the keys and the pull of the bellows grew stronger. The circus faded. He was nowhere in particular, just standing somewhere in space, fingering the sort of instrument he had longed for all his life, and giving to it the soul that had been caged by disappointment, by lack of interest, by disillusionment and hardships—

"That's pretty," a voice said.

The music ceased. Joe Barry felt the blood streaming into his face; he gulped and hastily replaced the accordion upon the chair.

"I didn't mean to play it," he said boyishly. Dazedly he realized that the girl who faced him, now in street clothing, had been a person of silk and tulle when he last had seen her, swinging gracefully about the center ring of the circus upon a dapple gray horse. Then haltingly:

"It's yours, I guess?"

"It's in my act," she said.

A pause followed, awkward yet natural, the mutual dispersing of all else while two young persons took stock of each other.

The girl was young, only a year or so more than twenty. She was vibrant and alert; with something more in the blue depths of her eyes than mere beauty. Her lips were the kind that laughed easily, yet which could settle

as quickly into firmness. Joe looked at her hands unconsciously; some one had told him that a circus girl's hands were hard and coarse. But these were fair, with tapering fingers.

Then the sun came gliding about the end of the little tent and crept into her hair, weaving a thousand meshes of gold there. She straightened, the clean-limbed vivacity of her rounding into evidence even under the handicap of clothing.

Joe liked her shoulders. They would have a delicious swing about them if she should be walking with a fellow along a sleepy, hedge-lined road. Suddenly the girl said:

"Why don't you play some more?"

Joe Barry stammered.

"I don't know many things," he fenced, and belied himself by reaching eagerly for the gleaming instrument on the chair. "A fellow doesn't get a chance to meet up with an Iorio every day."

"A what?" asked the girl.

"This kind of professional accordion. You know they're different from most kinds. Know much about accordions?"

"I'm afraid not," the girl confessed, and came closer. "You see, Uncle Dan—Mr. Dayton, you know—"

"Oh, he's your uncle?" asked Joe Barry, somewhat awed.

"Yes. I'm Sue Dayton." She smiled at the puzzled look in his eyes. "You're thinking of Mlle. La Fleur—that's just my sawdust name. My father and Uncle Dan were partners, until dad died. Uncle Dan really reared me in the ring; dad always looked after the business end of the show."

"I see." As a matter of fact, Joe Barry had paid little attention. Now with quick fingerings, he drew a soft melody from the responsive instrument in his grasp. Then again: "Gee, I oughtn't to be fooling around with this; it's too valuable."

"I WISH Blackie Jordan thought so," said the girl. "This is the second time he's just left it out here by my tent without telling me. Good thing Uncle Dan didn't notice it."

"He's the fellow who plays for you?" queried Joe.

"You saw the act, did you?"

"Yes." Joe was awkwardly silent. The girl smiled.

"Go ahead—you didn't like it?"

"Oh, I liked you."

"But you didn't like the act? Well," the girlishness of her had faded into a youthful maturity, "I know it isn't what it should be. You see, in the beginning, the idea was fine. Uncle Dan and I were looking for a different way to put on an equestrian act. There was a young Italian in the show then who could play the accordion. So between everybody, we decided on dressing Lombardi in a Pierrot costume, with me as a Pierrette, and shutting off the rest of the show to have him sing and play in the center of the ring while I rested between turns. We could do that all right; the tent is small enough for a voice to reach all parts of it."

Strangeness had vanished between the two now; youth has a habit of being able to wipe out extraneous matters when a common bond has been found.

"We'd planned it a lot different from the way Blackie does it. But Lombardi was hurt just a week before we opened, and I don't suppose he'll ever be able to troupe again. We'd already spent all this money for the best accordion Uncle Dan could buy, so we thought we'd salvage what we could.

Of course Blackie only plays a little, and he hates it, so he doesn't help much."

"You know, I thought that! I kind of felt he hurt things," Joe confessed. "You were so—so pretty and graceful, riding around there, and so, oh, you know, sort of fresh and sweet-looking and everything—"

"Be careful!" Sue Dayton laughed, and grasping a guy rope, put her head against her upraised arm.

"Well—you know, I was just telling you what I was thinking. If there were somebody in there who just loved to play, then, instead of just the circus shutting down, maybe there could be some of those flower-ropes, I don't know what you call them, let down from above, with those girls that are in the grand entrée—is that what you call it?—moving around slowly, weaving them in and out. Of course, it was kind of silly; I've never seen anything in a circus like that."

"Silly?" The girl touched his arm. "Just because it's never been done?" Suddenly she whirled, and called: "Uncle Dan!"

A red-faced man with gray hair and a bulbous nose halted abruptly in his swift course from the padroom entrance of the big top. A riding crop banged angrily against his shiny riding boots. He glared, lips pursed, then jamming his free hand into a pocket of his tight-fitting riding breeches, he jerked forth a flaming handkerchief with which he wiped at his forehead.

"Where's Blackie?" he demanded brusquely. "They're just about set up over there."

"I guess he's gone as usual," Sue said at last. "I found the accordion on the chair outside my dressing tent."

"Every time I want that fellow, he's somewhere else!"

"You told him we were going to broadcast, didn't you?"

"Told him? I made a speech about it." Again he looked toward Joe Barry as if trying to understand his presence. "You with the broadcasting outfit?"

Sue Dayton laughed.

"No," she explained. "Mr.—he and I just happened to meet here, Uncle Dan. He's got the most wonderful idea for my act."

"Theatrical business?"

"No, sir," said Joe hesitantly.

"HE just happened to see the act and we got to talking about it," said Sue again. "Really, it would be beautiful—"

Again the riding crop banged against bootleather.

"What time have I got to be talking about acts now?" asked Dan Dayton in a tone of exasperation. "Talk about it after awhile. I've got that broadcast on my mind. Never saw it to fail with one of these private stations. I bought their hour for three o'clock. Here they are now, delayed till five o'clock, with half the people off the lot. Well, come on, Sue, we'll have to frame up some kind of a program—anything to get by with." Then he whirled and started away, only to halt. "Play that thing-a-ma-jig?" he asked of Joe Barry.

"A little."

"Just listen!" the girl chided. "He plays it beautifully!"

"Looking for a job?" Uncle Dan Dayton's choler had given way to interested showmanship.

Joe Barry stammered.

"Well, I don't know. Yes—I guess I'd sure like one."

"Sing any?"

"A little."

at the microphone, laughing and talking to an invisible audience; some clowns, still in make-up, standing in the background; Cat-House Green, the menagerie superintendent, fussing about as he made ready to extract roars and growls from a cage of lions and tigers which had been hauled close to the point of broadcast; Uncle Dan making announcements.

These things had passed almost unnoticed, yet they would live forever with Joe Barry. Then, too, there had been his own act when fright of the microphone had been forgotten in a greater sensation. Joe had not played for the radio audience. He had played for Sue Dayton, smiling at him from the sidelines, and making the motions of applause.

After the broadcasting had finished, he had still lingered, even though there had drummed through his brain the galling insistence that he must hurry away, back to the city and to a man who was awaiting him for a verdict.

It had been strange happiness, this mixture of fear and agony and joy, this constant conflict of watchfulness and naïveté, of friendly conversation and inner guardedness.

There had been so many things to see and do; dinner in the cook-house, wandering around the lot during the cool of evening, and after that, the performance and a seat in the first row where he could watch Sue as she came into the ring and dream of how wonderful it would be if he could only take the place of that lackadaisical Blackie who played as though he hated it.

Ambition had truly come to Joe for the first time in his life, for the simple reason that for the first time he had found himself in the atmosphere for which he was fitted.

The circus!

To grow with it, to learn it and understand it, to build with it and for it, and make her know that he was the kind of a fellow who could broaden out and accomplish things . . .

BUT finally the act was over and Joe Barry found himself outside the circus tent, stumbling along in the moonlight because she had told him to meet her—and talk over his salary and contract. And the old fear was on him anew, that there could be no contract because there was a previous one, by which he must cease to exist as a human entity.

At last he saw her, awaiting him at the padroom entrance, dressed for the street. Now they were walking, and he had taken her arm, as if to guide her over the roughness of the lot; the warmth of her flesh had crept through to the palm of his hand and was thrilling onward to his heart.

"As if I hadn't walked around the lot all my life," she said. But she did not draw away.

Onward they went, past the place where her little tent had been; already it was dismantled and being shoved into the canvas wagon, while property men were running with her trunks to another tableau, that they also might be packed.

The horse tents were gone, too, and the cook-house; vague, bulking forms, the elephants were leaving the lot, and the sidewalls were being dropped from the menagerie as the last of the animal dens was hauled forth to start upon its journey to the loading runs. The circus was dismantling in a dozen places, even while it offered its wares to the night audience.

For the first time, Joe really understood its magic, the speed and system by which it worked.

Here went a stake-puller, methodically yanking out the heavy spines of wood which had been so painstakingly driven into the ground that morning. Over at the side show, set off to one side now by the descent of the Midway concessions, the lights still gleamed and the triangle clattered as the ballyhoo man strove for just one more audience before disintegration must begin there also.

In the darkness, six- and eight-horse teams stood quietly, patient shadows awaiting their loads, their drivers drowsing upon their backs. Menagerie boys passed, whistling against the darkness, with the led stock: Shetlands, goats, llamas, and the one camel. Back at the big top the band flared into a blatant chord and began rapidly with new music.

"Uncle Dan's railroading the show," she said. "We've got a long run to-night."

"I thought you always railroaded," said Joe.

"Circus slang for hurry," said Sue Dayton. "Making it move a little faster so we can be loaded and out of town for a long trip. We've always got to be thinking about to-morrow."

She paused then, and by her action, turned Joe about to follow her gaze. They had progressed almost the breadth of the lot now; the circus was in the far away, a squatty, bright-spotted tent, shaded at the eaves by the shadows of the spectators.

The flags had been lowered from the mastheads. The menagerie tent had disappeared even in this short space of time; there was no trace of it, save the stark poles, standing black in the brilliant moonlight, and the shadows of men, doubled over the ground as they went about the unlacing of the "round top" and middle pieces.

But the big top was there; the moon rode high above it, giving a mellow appearance to its splotches of light, and to the canvas itself a pearly brilliance.

"IT'S the only time we ever look back. That's the wonderful thing about the circus," she philosophized. "Yesterday's dead. To-day's just to-day—it'll be yesterday too as soon as the performance is over. But to-morrow will be a new day, with a different town and a new lot and new faces and a new chance for a big house and a good performance. Isn't it wonderful—to live always in to-morrow?"

Joe Barry cleared his throat. He jerked at his shoulders as if to free them from a sudden weight.

"To-morrow may not be so good for me," he said huskily. It was an unconscious admission. The girl paused.

"But why?" she laughed. "That's not very complimentary to us."

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way." Companionship, confidence, the feeling of a friendly person had all but broken the barriers of secrecy. "I want to come here more than anything else in the world," he burst forth. "If I can."

"But maybe you can get out of this other job. I hope you can," Sue went on. "Do you know you just seem to be showfolks. That's the highest compliment we know—to call outsiders showfolks. But you really seem to be meant for the circus. We can tell pretty easily whether a person genuinely loves it or not."

"Yes—I guess so."

"And don't let Uncle Dan make you nervous. That's all exterior; he's really as gentle as a kitten."

"He doesn't mean anything," said Joe dully.

"And really, he's terribly excited over your idea."

Here went a stake-puller, methodically yanking out the heavy spines of wood which had been so painstakingly driven into the ground that morning. Over at the side show, set off to one side now by the descent of the Midway concessions, the lights still gleamed and the triangle clattered as the ballyhoo man strove for just one more audience before disintegration must begin there also.

In the darkness, six- and eight-horse teams stood quietly, patient shadows awaiting their loads, their drivers drowsing upon their backs. Menagerie boys passed, whistling against the darkness, with the led stock: Shetlands, goats, llamas, and the one camel. Back at the big top the band flared into a blatant chord and began rapidly with new music.

"Uncle Dan's railroading the show," she said. "We've got a long run to-night."

"I thought you always railroaded," said Joe.

"Circus slang for hurry," said Sue Dayton. "Making it move a little faster so we can be loaded and out of town for a long trip. We've always got to be thinking about to-morrow."

She paused then, and by her action, turned Joe about to follow her gaze. They had progressed almost the breadth of the lot now; the circus was in the far away, a squatty, bright-spotted tent, shaded at the eaves by the shadows of the spectators.

The flags had been lowered from the mastheads. The menagerie tent had disappeared even in this short space of time; there was no trace of it, save the stark poles, standing black in the brilliant moonlight, and the shadows of men, doubled over the ground as they went about the unlacing of the "round top" and middle pieces.

But the big top was there; the moon rode high above it, giving a mellow appearance to its splotches of light, and to the canvas itself a pearly brilliance.

"IT'S the only time we ever look back. That's the wonderful thing about the circus," she philosophized. "Yesterday's dead. To-day's just to-day—it'll be yesterday too as soon as the performance is over. But to-morrow will be a new day, with a different town and a new lot and new faces and a new chance for a big house and a good performance. Isn't it wonderful—to live always in to-morrow?"

Joe Barry cleared his throat. He jerked at his shoulders as if to free them from a sudden weight.

"To-morrow may not be so good for me," he said huskily. It was an unconscious admission. The girl paused.

"But why?" she laughed. "That's not very complimentary to us."

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way." Companionship, confidence, the feeling of a friendly person had all but broken the barriers of secrecy. "I want to come here more than anything else in the world," he burst forth. "If I can."

"But maybe you can get out of this other job. I hope you can," Sue went on. "Do you know you just seem to be showfolks. That's the highest compliment we know—to call outsiders showfolks. But you really seem to be meant for the circus. We can tell pretty easily whether a person genuinely loves it or not."

"Yes—I guess so."

"And don't let Uncle Dan make you nervous. That's all exterior; he's really as gentle as a kitten."

"He doesn't mean anything," said Joe dully.

"And really, he's terribly excited over your idea."

"Was he?" Joe Barry bucked up momentarily. "I've got a new one," he added hastily. "It came to me while I was watching your act. The old stage manager out in Waverly used to call it a snow-box. Anyway, you could have one of those hung away up above you, and it would sift out pieces of paper that would look like apple blossoms falling and then you could have colored flood-lights to throw on it—you know, when the playing and singing is going on."

"Oh, that would be just beautiful." Sue Dayton clapped her hands. "I'll take it up with Uncle Dan. We'll have it all fixed up by the time you come back."

JOE BARRY rubbed a palm across his eyes.

"What if I shouldn't come back?" he asked boyishly. "Would you feel mad about it?"

"Of course not. We realize how those things are. We'd like to have you, though, if you can arrange it." They were merely strolling now. "Circus people have to be a lot different from most persons in business. The time element forces us to use snap judgment. But," she laughed, "we're pretty good judges of human nature. We don't make many mistakes."

"You—you think I'm all right, then?" he asked haltingly.

"Why, of course. Why not?"

Joe Barry stumbled.

"Oh, I'm in trouble, Miss Dayton," he blurted. Reserve for the moment had vanished. "A man is trying to get me into a mess. I promised I'd do something for him—he was paying me for it. I was broke; I'd got fired from my job. And he came along and offered me a lot of money and I wasn't thinking what I was doing. Now maybe he'll make me go through with it, and I don't want to. I don't want to do anything that isn't right, Miss Dayton."

She laughed; there was surprise in it.

"Any one could tell that." Then soberly: "I knew you were worried about something."

"I'm awful worried," said Joe. "And I can't tell you what it is—except that it isn't anything I've done."

"Everything will come out all right." She put a snap into her voice. "You've *got* to make it come out all right."

"That's it!" he said. Hurriedly he reached for his cheap watch. "Gee, I've got to hurry. The last train back leaves at ten o'clock. I can't afford to miss it, Miss—Sue. I've got to catch it, because he said he'd get my answer to-night and I'm going to tell him I won't take his job. I oughtn't ever to have thought about it in the beginning."

"People don't stop to think much when they're broke—Joe," she said.

"I didn't. But I ought t've. But I'll see him to-night. And I'll tell him I don't want his old job. Gee, Miss—Sue, I'd rather be here than any place in the world."

"I'd like to have you here," she answered, and there was something more than politeness in her tone.

Joe held his watch to the moonlight.

"Gee! I've got to hurry." He held forth a hand. "Goo'night—Sue," he said.

"Good night, Joe," she answered, and took his proffered hand. "Good luck. We'll be watching for you."

HE said something in answer, husky and unintelligible. Then stumbling over the ruts, he hurried onward across the lot. But at the edge he turned for an instant and

looked back, to the faint form of a girl moving in the opposite direction toward the circus train. Then she, too, turned, and he could see that she raised her hand.

After a moment, Joe Barry caught hastily at his throat, rubbing it as he walked.

Down at the station, the train screamed in, and a tight-lipped young man climbed aboard, carrying his bundle of discarded clothing which he had checked there before going to the circus lot. He had almost forgotten it. There was only one thing on Joe Barry's mind now: that man named Martin!

There couldn't be any argument about this thing. Joe would simply have to tell him what had happened, honestly, frankly, and demand that he be let out of his bargain.

He'd make his offer of repayment for the money he had spent—nearly seventy-five dollars as he remembered it. Perhaps he could pawn his accordion for part of it. He could send the rest from the circus; Sue Dayton had promised him thirty-five a week at the start and more if he lived up to expectations.

He'd tell Martin all that, and he'd try to convince him. But if the attorney tried to hold him to his bargain, there was a remedy. An inspiration had told Joe he could go to the police.

It had not occurred to him until the necessity of escape arose that he might be taking part in something approaching the criminal. He had looked upon the law only as a voracious thing demanding a penalty, not as a bulwark of society that exacts a price which a particular person should pay and no one else.

But it had to be done quickly—Joe knew that. The element of time struck Joe Barry with sudden forcefulness. Down at police headquarters, they might think it queer even now, that he hadn't reported this before.

Then came a new fear; what if it had gone too far already? He erased that. Nothing had really been arranged yet; he didn't even know the name of the man whose place he was supposed to take, or exactly what he had done. Martin had said he would take that matter up after Joe had really made his decision.

"Well, I've made it!" Joe Barry mumbled.

The train seemed to drag after that. At the station he took a taxi, for the first time in his life. At last he was standing before the smear-faced old wooden building that was his home. Joe Barry, strangely weak in his knees, opened the old door and started up the creaking stairway.

"Well, where you been this time?" It was a querulous, angry voice from the first landing. "No beds made, no sweeping—"

Joe Barry snapped a rejoinder and went on. So Martin's chauffeur had not been there! It gave him sudden hope. What if this were not so serious after all? Some perverted form of humor on the part of an idle person just to see what a desperate young man would do under such circumstances—what if that were it?

WHEN he reached the door of his room, he pawed deep into his pocket for his personal key, sent it into the lock. The door yielded, a faint V of light went into the room from the gas jet in the hall.

Joe Barry halted, his lower jaw loose in surprise. On the floor before him lay something metallic, something

which had been pushed under the door. Then he sat on the bed and laughed.

It had been a joke! It had been a joke, that's all—just somebody playing a joke on him! They'd sneaked up here during the day and returned that pass-key he had given Martin, by slipping it under the door.

But just as suddenly, he sobered. Nobody would give a fellow a thousand dollars for a joke! He fingered the remainder of the money which he had saved from his two accounts. He looked at the pass-key; suddenly he went to the gas jet and struck a match, illuminating the room. He searched the floor for a note. There was nothing. He jerked out his cheap watch, suddenly ticking with clock-like resonance.

"I won't give him any leeway." Joe had almost slumped to the bed again, the pass-key still in his right hand. Again he studied it. Why had they just come up here and slipped the thing under the door?

A minute passed; Joe confirmed it by looking at his watch. Then he began to count—one, two, three, four, five—he wondered how much a person would have to count before it all made a minute.

He fumbled his watch; it slipped from his sweating hand and he caught it with the other, clicking the pass-key against it. He remembered how the old photographer back in Waverly used to count for time exposures, one thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three—

He started and listened. He settled again. Only some roomer; several of them, stopping at the second landing, and the high-pitched, complaining voice of a lodger reiterating the fact above the mumbling questions of others that no beds had been made up, no rooms swept out.

Then the stairs creaked. As if men were moving quietly upward. Or maybe it was just a lodger going down to the street—

Suddenly Joe jerked to his feet, as if jolted by electricity. Some one was outside his room. The staccato, hollow pounding came again. Joe Barry moved forward. He swung wide the door.

Four men stood there, well-dressed men, staring quietly at him. One flipped his coat back, and the edge of a shield gleamed in the gas-light.

"You're Joe Barry," he said. The words were more like a statement than a question.

Joe could not answer. Two of the men dodged swiftly behind him.

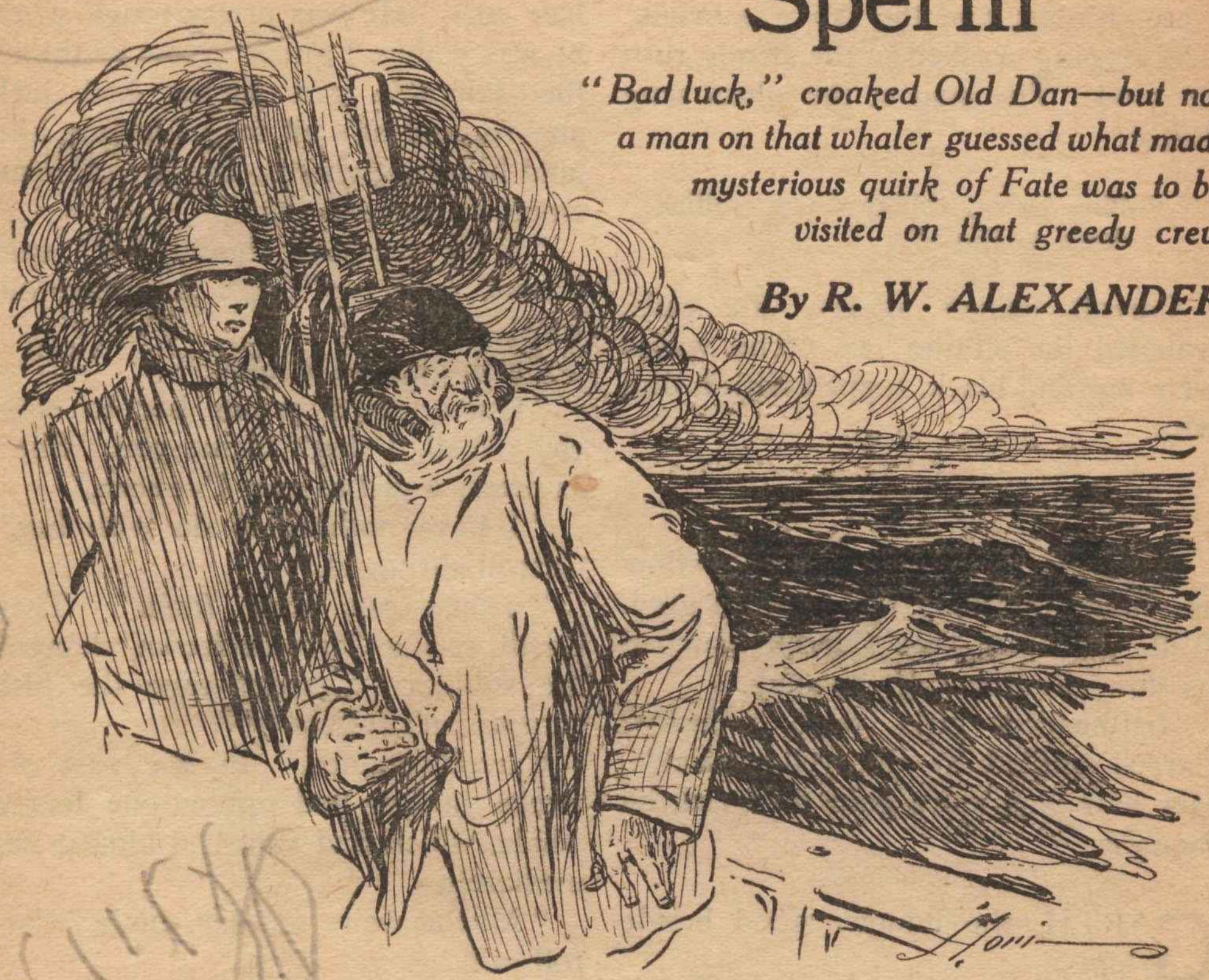
"Fan him for a rod," came a coldly monotonous voice. "Better not take any chances."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Sperm

"Bad luck," croaked Old Dan—but not a man on that whaler guessed what mad, mysterious quirk of Fate was to be visited on that greedy crew

By R. W. ALEXANDER



"Hell brewin'," he muttered, for all the world like some villainous old parrot

OLD DAN whittled at the stick of tobacco. He was gray-bearded and dirty, muffled to the ears in thick woolen garments.

"Mates, there's bad luck aboard."

Garth, the hunter, looked up from the harpoon he was sharpening. "How?"

Old Dan gestured with one gnarled hand. "Wimmin an' things," he said vaguely.

"What things?" Garth was insistent.

"Wimmin an' things," Old Dan said again. "Sailin' Friday, an' such like."

"There's only one woman aboard," Carroll said.

Old Dan nodded.

"One's enough." He looked at the faces about him, dim in the shadows of the fo'c's'le. "Ain't that so?"

A rumble of assent came from them.

"Who ever heard of a woman on a whaler?" said Old Dan querulously. "'Tain't right."

"She's only a girl," said Carroll.

Old Dan turned rheumy eyes on him. "You're young. You don't know nothin'. You—"

Garth struck in. "Where's the bad luck, Dan?"

Old Dan became surly.

"You wait an' see. There never yet was a red-headed woman as wasn't unlucky." He stuffed tobacco into his pipe, leaned over to the lamp. "Back in the sixties, I reckon it was—"

Carroll went on deck. The stars were shining, and the sky was bright. The rigging creaked in the steady rush of wind. The man at the wheel sang softly:

"Rolling down, rolling down, rolling down to Rio—"

Carroll leaned against the rails, watched the sliding sea. The waves were big and black, topped with a dim white

"We're rolling down to Rio."

A paring of moon came up, yellow as orange, touching the sea with gold. With brooding eyes Carroll watched its slow climb among the stars.

Red-headed girls were unlucky? Carroll smiled at the yellow sickle. Her hair was more gold than red, he thought.

GARTH, the hunter, stood beside him.

"That darned old fool is out to make trouble."

Carroll stirred to look at him. "Old Dan?"

"Yes. He has the men talking."

Carroll was silent. He could not agree that Old Dan was likely to make trouble.

"You see," Garth said, settling himself against the rails, "Dan's old. He can't realize that things have changed since he was young."

Carroll watched the moon. Old Dan interested him little.

"When Dan was about your age," Garth went on, "he sailed with Bully Hayes—who was one of the biggest ruffians in the Pacific. Dan can't realize those days are past. Ever seen him drunk?"

"No," Carroll said.

"He sings songs that'd make your hair curl. He was pretty tough when he was young, I guess. Now he thinks the skipper's girl means bad luck aboard, and he's all for us having him land her somewhere. But the old man wouldn't agree to that."

"Why the hell should he?" said Carroll hotly. "Dan's a cursed old fool!"

Garth glanced at him.

"Guess you'd prefer her to stay, eh? Well, I don't blame you. She's as pretty a girl as ever I've seen."

"I have nothing to do with her," Carroll shrugged.

"That's not your fault." Then Garth, seeing Carroll's frown, changed the subject. "About time the luck turned, isn't it?"

Carroll nodded. In the past six weeks the brig had sighted one distant whale, which had vanished almost immediately.

"Maybe we're too far south," Carroll said.

"Maybe." Garth sniffed the air. "Wind somewhere, I guess." He glanced up at the clear sky. "Queer . . . Don't be surprised if it's blowing before sunup."

CARROLL was aloft when the sun rose, taking in sail before a strengthening wind. The north was dark with cloud, the sea leaden. He saw white horses marching down upon the brig in serried ranks stretched from horizon to horizon. The black cloud spread until it blotted out the sun. Lightning flickered palely on its edges.

The girl was down there, watching. Carroll saw the tossing red of her hair as she fronted the wind, the white oval of her face glanced at the men working feverishly above. Was she afraid?

He doubted it. There was in her attitude something of defiance, as if she dared the storm to do its worst. Carroll smiled as he went down.

She was watching him, he knew, going forward. She was interested in him, then? He turned swiftly, looked back. Along the length of the deck she laughed at him, then at the darkling sky. That showed him how very little she feared the sea and the storm.

Swaying lightly on wide-planted feet, he watched the gathering blackness. The clouds were piled one on another to a tremendous height, shutting out the sky and the sun. Beneath them the leaden sea changed to a dull purple; the broken crests became gray. Never before had Carroll seen anything like it. As yet the wind came in gusts, with long spaces of calm between. The brig rolled uneasily, jerkily, under bare poles.

Masters, the skipper, came on deck. He glanced aloft and at the blackness to the north. The girl joined him as Carroll went below.

"Hell brewin'," Old Dan muttered. "Hell brewin'."

Carroll answered nothing.

Old Dan leered at him. "When I was your age—"

"Stow the gab!" said Carroll sourly.

"Wimmin, wimmin—" grumbled the old man.

"What the hell do you mean?" demanded the younger man sharply.

Old Dan snarled quick obscenity.

Two hours after dawn, wind caught the brig, heeled her over until her starboard rails were under water, then passed suddenly, leaving her rocking there on the troubled sea.

"Hell brewin'," Old Dan muttered, for all the world like some villainous parrot. "Hell brewin'."

The wind came again, with increased violence. The Oregon staggered, rolled deep, shook herself, and drove forward with her scuppers a green, roaring tide.

"Guess we're in for something out of the ordinary," said Garth, the hunter.

"When I was a lad—" began Old Dan, and Carroll fled.

He clawed his way on deck, clung there watching the dark mountains called into being by the wind. The last vestige of blue was shut from the sky; the mass of leaden cloud hung heavy everywhere. The Oregon pitched with a sharp, sickening motion; spray swept like hail along her deck.

Aft, Carroll saw the girl. Sight of her sent a little thrill through him, of admiration and apprehension at once. She was in danger and knew it, and cared not at all.

He went slowly aft, clinging to the ropes stretched taut along the rails. As the brig rolled, water swirled about his knees, tugged at his feet with careless strength. His face was sore from the sting of the spray, his eyes smarting. The wind roared hollowly about the naked masts.

Intent on the troubled water, the girl had not seen him come. She stood lithe and slender against the deckhouse, one arm crooked about a dangling rope. Her head was bare, her red hair streaming water, her cheeks whipped to pink by the laden wind. Carroll took her by the elbow, and she turned startled eyes to him.

"You'd better go below," he roared.

"What?"

"You'd better go below."

He saw the flame of anger leap in her eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"It's dangerous here," he explained tritely.

"I know that."

Carroll laughed. Of course she had known it. But her knowledge made no difference. "You might be swept overboard."

"What's that to you?"

A wave came seething over the rails, lifted them, flung them across the deck. Carroll gripped the girl with one arm, sought with the other for the lifelines. He could see nothing, hear nothing but the roar of water. The girl was struggling, though not to break his grip. He felt rope, caught it, twisted it about his arm. The water receded, and they breathed deep. The Oregon righted herself heavily, drunkenly.

"You see," Carroll said.

She laughed.

"I'm wet through. I'd better go down."

Carroll helped her to the companion-way.

"You're not hurt?" he said in sudden concern.

"No."

She smiled at him, was gone. Carroll fought his way for'ard.

FOUR days the Oregon drove on before the storm, until the men were red-eyed and surly and short of speech, and even Old Dan's garrulity was checked. Late the fourth day the wind dropped, and by nightfall of the fifth day the sea was calm. The Oregon floated idly.

"Something over there," Garth said, pointing in the gathering dusk.

Carroll saw it, a thin black line on the horizon, shadow-wreathed.

"Looks like land."

Garth nodded. "Wonder where we are?"

A long-drawn cry came from above:

"There she blows!"

The skipper was on deck, swearing.

"Where away, man, where away?"

The voice of the lookout came again.

"Two points off the port bow, sir."

Masters leveled his glass. The night was fast swathing them in darkness.

"There's land out there, sir," Carroll said.

Masters snarled at him.

"Land be damned! There's no land within a thousand miles."

"We saw it, sir," Garth insisted.

But the skipper was gone, muttering.

"I don't blame him," Garth said. "Our luck's right out this run. Seven weeks out and we haven't filled a barrel."

The night darkened stealthily. Shadows closed about the listless ship. The Oregon floated in blackness, with not even the sound of waves to tell of the water everywhere.

Late in the first dogwatch Carroll heard a whisper of sound. It was a whisper, no more, like something breathing out there in the darkness. Yet a flat calm held the ship, and her masts were steady against the sky. He listened an instant, then called softly to the man who kept watch with him.

"Hear that, Sam?"

The man came to him, looming abruptly from the shadows.

"Hear what?"

"Listen," Carroll said.

They listened, and the sound came again, a long-drawn sigh, as if some half human monster rested out there on the placid sea.

"That's waves on a beach," Sam said.

"But the sea's calm."

"There never yet was a sea so calm that it didn't make waves on a beach. Better call the old man, eh?"

"Maybe so," Carroll said dubiously.

Masters came swearing on deck.

"You're imagining things, man!" he stormed in disgust.

"It's waves on a beach, sir," Sam said doggedly.

"Be quiet a minute, then! Let me listen."

They listened, and the whisper came softly through the darkness. To Carroll it seemed a little louder than before.

"Heave the lead," Masters ordered.

The lead splashed overboard.

"Fifteen fathom, sir," Sam reported presently. "Shingle bottom."

"Try again."

The lead went down again, with a strange, gulping sound.

"On the mark fourteen, sir."

Masters grunted.

"Call the bo's'n and have the anchor down. We'll see where we are at sun-up."

The boatswain came on deck, sleepy and blasphemous; the anchor went down with a splash and a rattle of chain.

"What in hell's that?" Sam said.

There were sounds of movement in the darkness about the brig, strange, heavy sounds, splashes and surging. But presently they ceased, and silence fell again.

"I'll be glad when light comes," Sam said. "I don't like this."

CARROLL, later, watched the east pale and flush at the promise of day. A mist lay on the water, pearly white. It swirled in little eddies here and there, although there was no wind.

The sun rose and the mist thinned. Patches of blue water showed in it.

"Look there!" Sam said and gripped Carroll's arm.

A dark bulk passed lazily through one of the clear patches. The lookout saw it with them, and his voice floated down.

"*There she blows!*"

Masters came on deck in trousers and shirt.

"Bose, where the hell— Pipe the men on deck, you fool!"

The voice of the lookout came again.

"An' sperm at that!"

Now that the sun was up, the mist cleared quickly. The blue patches spread, and the voice of the lookout came monotonously.

"There she blows . . . There she blows. . . ."

The mist was gone. A few cables' lengths away was an island, low, flat, covered with short scrub.

"Get the boats away!" Masters roared. The water was black with whales.

Garth caught him by the arm. "Listen, sir—"

"What the devil! Get to your boat, damn you!" Masters flung himself free.

"You listen to me," said the hunter, pale with rage. "Look out there!" He waved a long arm. "They're cows! They've mostly calves. Does that tell you anything?"

"It tells me we're in luck," Masters answered savagely.

Garth caught him again, in a grip not lightly to be shaken off.

"It tells *me* we're at the island where the whales come to have their young. You've heard of it often enough, and so have I. We'd better leave them alone."

"Go to hell!" Masters said, and with an effort tore himself free. "I'll take your place myself, if you're so squeamish."

"You can take mine as well," Carroll said. "I'll have nothing to do with this."

One boat was down, ready, the men waiting.

"Heave away!" Masters cried. He climbed into the second boat, and the men lowered her swiftly. He looked up at the few left on deck.

"Dan, follow with the third boat. Now, men, row!"

THE first boat was already fast to a whale. Carroll watched the killing with anger and a sense of horror. It was the first he had seen, and it sickened him. The whale had a calf by its side, and struggled little. Yet two hours or more had passed before the final flurry was over, and the men began to tow the carcass to the brig. The calf followed.

The other boats, too, had each made a kill. Masters was jubilant as he came aboard. He halted in front of Garth and Carroll.

"See, my hearties, we can get along without you."

Garth nodded.

"Maybe so. Anyway, you'll get no help from us."

"I've a mind to put you in irons!"

"Time enough to talk like that when you get away from here. I've heard of ships that found this island before, and nary a one of them got back to port."

Masters went away laughing.

The girl, Carroll noted, had stayed below all morning. That was as well, he thought. What had threatened to turn his strong stomach must surely have proved too much for hers.

All day the men worked, and all night by the red glare of blazing oil: and when dawn came the three denuded skeletons were let drift away. Gulls descended on them in white clouds, screaming. Sharks had gathered and feasted royally. The troubled water was thick with a scum of oil and blood. Yet a few hundred yards distant the mother whales played with their young.

That day, and the following night, the men slept, and dawn saw them in the boats once more.

"It's murder!" Garth said savagely.

Carroll nodded in silence.

"Those gulls are hell!"

"They're driving me mad," Carroll said.

The first boat was headed back, towing its kill.

"There'll be bad luck over this," Garth said. "I'm not superstitious; but I have a hunch—"

Again Masters halted before them as he came aboard. "Still squeamish?" he said curiously.

"Do you think you'll get to port?" Garth said.

Masters shrugged.

"Why not?" He nodded toward the whales dotting the placid water. "What's the full of a ship from that number? Nothing."

"It's not one ship," said Garth. "It's hundreds. You'd come back again yourself. The men would leave you, and sell their knowledge to other skippers. Every whaler in the Pacific would be here inside a year. Then—" He spread his hands. "You know what would happen then."

"Partly, that's why I'm going when these three are barreled," Masters said. "Partly that, and partly because my daughter is against the idea of this 'slaughter,' as she calls it. As for coming back, I haven't taken the bearings of the island, and I don't intend to. So the men won't be able to lead other skippers back, and what you're afraid of won't happen."

"I'm glad," Garth said. "This place wasn't meant to be found."

"Maybe you're right," Masters nodded, and went aft.

ON the day that the Oregon was to sail, Old Dan showed his hand.

"Me an' the men," he told Masters, "has decided to stay." He turned to the crowd behind him. "Ain't that so, mates?"

"That's so!"

"You can decide what you damn' well like," Masters said. "We sail."

"There's a fortune here," snarled Old Dan.

"It's staying here. Get for'ard!"

"It's your gal—"

"Leave my girl out of this! Get for'ard, I say!"

"Get to hell, I say!" Old Dan mimicked and pulled a revolver from his pocket. He fired twice and Masters crumpled to the deck.

"You!" Old Dan snarled, turning the gun on Carroll and Garth. "Not a whimper now, or you'll get the same! From now on I'm skipper aboard this hooker, an' don't you forget it. Make trouble, an'—" He made an ugly gesture. "I'm not a man to fool with."

Carroll watched the men. They were with Old Dan; their faces told him that. Some might have been shocked by the murder; but it had failed to alter their stand. They saw riches before them, and a life or two would not block their way.

"What's it to be now?" Old Dan said menacingly.

"Guess we'll sit in with you," said Garth.

"An' you?" The muzzle of the gun turned square on Carroll.

"I'll answer for him," Garth said easily.

"Right." Old Dan pocketed the revolver. "Get two boats out, mates, an' do a bit more killin'."

"The girl," Carroll said unsteadily to Garth. "You tell her."

"There's no need."

She stood at the head of the companionway. A long moment she stood, staring, then came forward.

"Get her below," Garth whispered.

Somehow, Carroll got her below. She seemed dazed, bewildered.

"Best stay here," Carroll said. "We'll bring him to his cabin."

With Garth, he carried Masters below, laid him on his bunk.

"Keep quiet and wait," Garth said softly. "Let them think you've fallen for their scheme. We can't do anything now."

"I'm afraid for the girl," Carroll said.

"We can keep an eye on her."

They stretched a sheet over the dead captain, then went on deck. The two boats had made fast to whales.

"This can't last," Garth said.

They watched the kills, saw the first boat head back toward the ship. Old Dan waved it off.

"Bring it ashore, mates. It's handier to work ashore than aboard." He turned to the men on deck. "Get the barrels out, an' we'll float 'em to the beach."

The barrels were floated ashore in long strings, rolled a little distance up the beach. Fires were lighted, and black smoke climbed slowly into the bright sky.

"Them fires don't go out," Old Dan said, "until every barrel aboard is full."

IN the days that followed, it seemed to Carroll that Old Dan had spoken the truth. Always the black smoke rose heavily from the beach, always the sea bore a scum of blood and oil. Gulls screamed unceasingly, and tore

at the fragments of blubber with bills dyed red. Through the scum moved fins of sharks.

The men were drinking heavily. At night they held carouse on the brig, and the deep roar of their voices rang across the quiet sea. Carroll, then, leaned against the door of the girl's cabin, ceaselessly watching. Even there he caught fragment on fragment of Old Dan's obscene ditties, and paled with rage.

The girl now frankly showed her liking for Carroll. He saw her often, when he brought her food; for now she never left her cabin.

"I have only you to trust," she said once. "Soon or late, these others will kill me."

"Kill you?" Carroll echoed.

She nodded. "They would be fools to let me live. I think they will kill you, too, and maybe Garth. For their own safety they must."

"Garth and I," he said unsteadily, "will protect you—always."

Fleetingly, she touched his hand.

"I know. You're different. I've often wondered about you."

"I don't understand," said Carroll.

"You're not one of them—you weren't born to this."

"No." He stared at her curiously; he had not dreamed she knew him so well. "My father owns a few vessels, and I'm learning to be a sailor before taking charge of one of them."

He had a difficult subject to approach and found himself at a loss for words.

"You're thinking of my father?" she said. "We'll have to bury him, of course."

"Ashore," Carroll said.

"Ashore?" Her eyes widened. "The sharks! I had forgotten them. That's horrible! The whole thing is horrible."

She began to cry, brokenly, and Carroll, helpless as a man always is at such times, left her.

They brought the dead captain ashore that afternoon, and buried him in a little clearing in the scrub.

"Not too far from the beach," the girl said. "So that he can hear the gulls and the sea."

It was two nights later that the Oregon caught fire. Carroll saw the smoke against the stars, saw the masts begin to quiver, stared an instant, then leaped down the companionway and knocked at the girl's door.

"Better dress quickly," he said.

"Is anything the matter?"

"The ship's afire."

Her voice was steady when she answered him.

"I'll be ready in a moment."

Garth they found on deck, grim lipped, bitter.

"The dirty fools!" growled the hunter. "This is the end of all their plans."

The boats were alongside. Carroll lowered the girl into one, dropped down himself, followed by Garth. They pushed off, rowed ashore. Carroll took the girl in his arms, carried her through the shallows.

"Guess we better go back for some provisions," Garth said.

The alarm had been given and men were shouting. Old Dan took charge with a volley of blasphemy.

"Water an' grub! Look alive, you lubbers!"

"Try to put her out!" a man yelled.

"You might as well try to put out hell! Wait till the oil begins to go. Water an' grub, water an' grub!"

A thin red line of flame spurted across the deck, blazed a foot high, sank to a dull glow.

"Hurry!" Old Dan roared.

A muffled explosion shook the after hold. Old Dan leaped to the side.

"There she goes! It's every man for himself now." He dropped into one of the boats. "Come on, blast you! I'm waitin' half a minute, that's all."

The boats were full, the brig deserted.

"Push off, push off! She'll go any minute now."

A second explosion came, and a scarlet tongue leaped from the deck, turning the sea to blood, throwing the shadow of the masts, huge, distorted, on the great cloud of smoke above.

"There goes a good ship," said Old Dan regretfully.

The flame was leaping, leaping, leaping. They felt the hot kiss of it on their faces, and rowed for the beach. Sea and sky and beach were red as blood; the mother whales moved slowly off.

THE girl had vanished. Carroll knew where she would be found, and found her there, in the clearing where her father lay. He watched beside her until the stars paled and gray dawn came. Even then he did not waken her, but waited patiently until she stirred, sighed and sat up. She came to her feet, stared at the sea. The Oregon was gone. Charred timbers floated on the water; that was all.

"I'm glad," she said simply.

"We'll have to get away," Garth said to Carroll that day. "The fools are drinking themselves mad."

Carroll nodded.

Garth came to him that night as the fires died down.

"Don't wake the girl," he whispered. "Old Dan's set a man to watch the boats."

"I'll account for him," Carroll said.

"No. This is my job. Come on."

They went softly through the scrub, reached the beach, saw the dark figure of the watcher as he leaned against a boat. For the first time Carroll knew that Garth held a harpoon.

"It's the only way," Garth whispered, bringing back his arm. A moment he poised the shaft, then threw.

The watcher fell.

"Go back for the girl," said Garth.

Garth had a boat in the water when Carroll returned with the girl. Carroll lifted her in.

"Quiet!" Garth breathed, and they pushed off. Putting out the oars, they rowed gently.

"They'll follow," Carroll said.

Garth smiled in the darkness. Back on the beach a flame was born, leaped high.

"What's that?"

"The boats," said Garth grimly. "I set a fire going in their lockers when you were away."

"What? Then—they're marooned!"

"Yes," Garth said. "I meant that . . . I set the brig going, too. Those murderers will kill each other in a week."

The girl shivered. Carroll slipped an arm about her.

"Better sleep," he said gently.

Later a little wind blew up, and they hoisted the sail. When morning came the island was out of sight.

After two weeks they were picked up by a whaler.

"Where in hell have you come from?" said the skipper.

"The Oregon," said Garth. "She caught fire."

"You're the only survivors?"

Garth looked at Carroll, at the girl, and nodded.

THE END.

Bad Hombres

After the Civil War, carpet-baggers and thugs infested southern Missouri and ran things—but they ran into trouble when they tried to block the Texas cattle drive of Missouri-born Wash Calm

By HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "Speeding Up His Reputation," "The Vengeance of Osiris," etc.

"I've got three shots left," Texas warned

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

A WANDERER RETURNS.

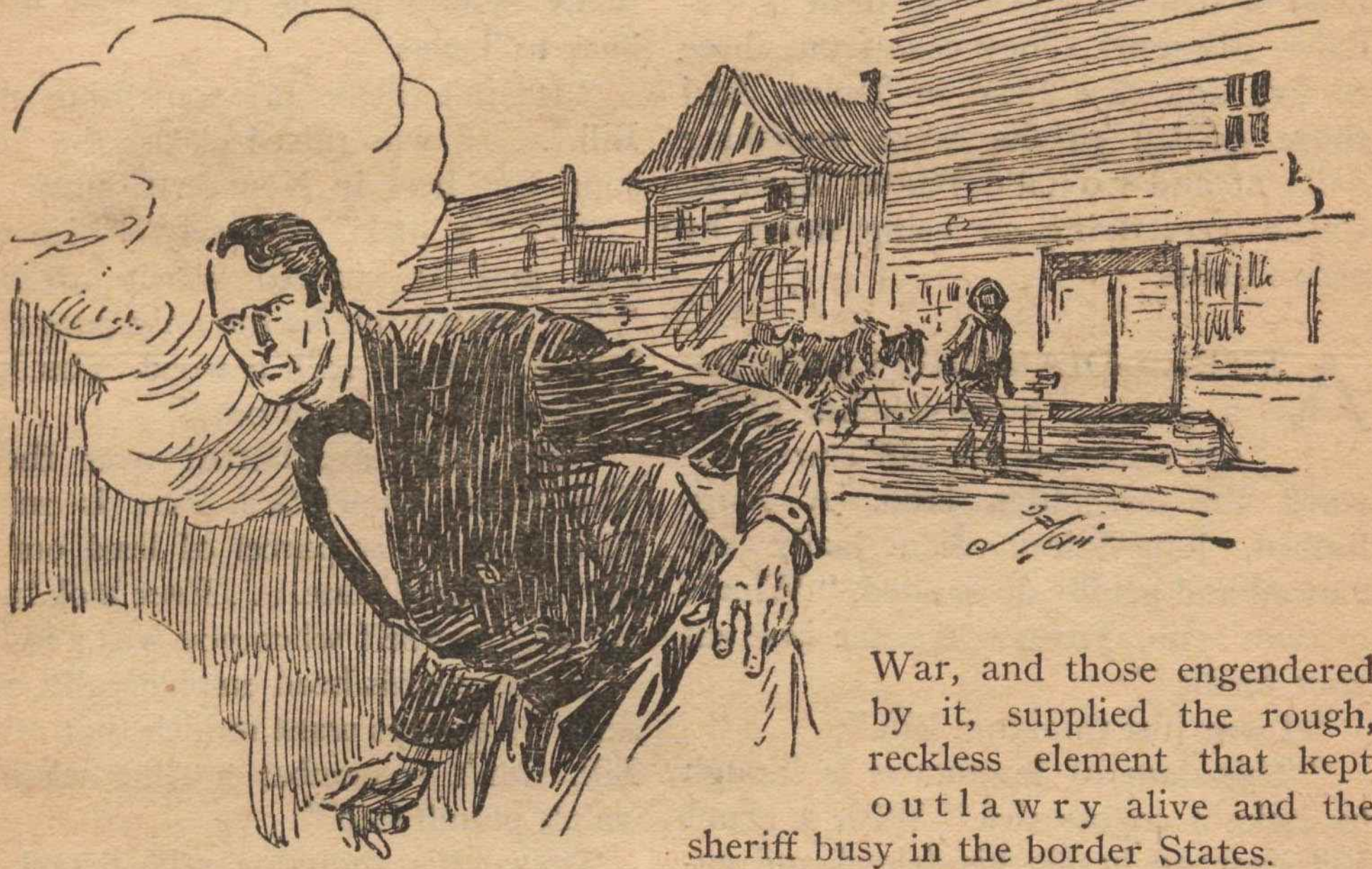
MANY thousands of cattle filled the country along the western boundaries of Jasper and Newton Counties, Missouri. The town of Baxter Springs, in the southeast corner of Kansas, close to the Missouri and Indian Territory lines, was practically blockaded, with many more thousands of longhorns being hurried to the congested area before the frost should kill the grass.

Out of more than a quarter of a million cattle only an insignificant part were destined to reach a profitable market. A tremendous loss was resulting from the Missourians' refusal to permit the long drives to penetrate the state and reach the Missouri Pacific Railroad.

No other railway head was nearer than that of the Kansas Pacific at Topeka. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe would afford no shipping points for several years. It is true that the Ray-Duffield outfit, starting with a thousand head in May, managed to reach Iowa with a few hundred steers. Re-

pulsed at Baxter Springs by Missouri men, this herd was driven around the settled portion of Kansas, crossed the Kansas river at St. Mary's, entered Nebraska and crossed the Missouri to find a market. As an example of grit and determination this drive was epic. As a financial enterprise it was disastrous.

Some herds had been taken east



from Baxter Springs along the Missouri-Arkansas line until they had gotten beyond the hostile region and could make north to a railway point east of Sedalia. But much of this country was mountainous and heavily timbered, and the cattle finished the drive footsore and in poor flesh. There was no profit from this venture, and to prevent a repetition of the sorry experiment men from Benton County, Arkansas, were gathered at Baxter.

These, with Missourians from Murphysburg, Leadville, Georgia City, and Gibsonville, completely sealed the border. Feuds, existing prior to the Civil War, and those engendered by it, supplied the rough, reckless element that kept outlawry alive and the sheriff busy in the border States.

Until bribed to permit the passage of a herd these hard citizens cited the "Spanish" or "Texas" fever as an excuse for the embargo. This sickness was a peculiar disease and could very well be put forward as a legitimate reason for "no thoroughfare."

Texas cattle in poor condition were carriers of the fever, but did not necessarily suffer from it themselves. It was fatal to northern cattle, however, even if they grazed over the same ground that had been occupied by an infected herd. Texas cattle that had wintered in the north were not carriers, but were susceptible to it if brought in contact with an infected herd. Only those re-

ceiving it directly from a Texas herd suffered.

But these reckless border-men were not so solicitous about their cattle, once they had been paid for a right of way. The border banditti killed many drovers and stole thousands of cattle.

What added to the ire of the frantic owners was the knowledge that beeves would bring as high as fifty dollars a head if delivered in good flesh at Sedalia, Missouri. They cost from three to five dollars a head in Texas. And those golden profits were vanishing daily at and r o u n d Baxter Springs. Cattle were dying, or being stolen by entire herds.

A THREE-DIAMOND waddie felt a strange homesickness as he sat cross-legged and stared toward the forbidden land. A long-limbed, long-haired man lazily advanced and gruffly demanded, "What's gnawin' you, Texas? S o m e one cut your bridle?"

"I was just thinking, Bill."

"This jam of longhorns is 'nough to make a coyote sick." With a grunt Bill dropped beside his friend and curiously peered under the huge hat-brim. Bill had a long, twisted jaw, and yellowish eyes. He lazily remarked, "Ten years since you threw in with the Three-Diamond."

"And you were my first and best friend, Bill."

"How you git thataway? If I was a friend you'd 'a' told me what was gnawing you all these years. You'd face your cards up an' tell me to take an eyeful."

Texas glanced around at the motley groups. Close by was a noisy Northerner, buying cattle he could not move with a worthless check. An Indian from the Shawnee Nation was offering to return stock he had stolen, for two dollars a head.

"You've been a powerful good friend to me, Bill," insisted Texas.

"Derned liar! If I was a friend you'd open up. Stomick a botherin' you?"

"Bill, I feel mighty blue."

"Reckon we all do, with them steers hogged up with no place to go. So many behind us we can't even drive back to Texas."

"It ain't cattle. It's something else, Bill. . . . I was raised across the Missouri line here in Newton County."

"That's bad!" hoarsely whispered Bill, and he glanced warily around. "But you an' me be the only ones that knows. I won't spill a word. You had nerve enough to pull out."

"My folks are buried over there. The cabin on Hick's Run is mine. There's a smart parcel of land out in the hills that's mine. . . . Ever look back an' pity yourself when you was a kid?"

Bill shook his head emphatically, and said, "I always want to kick that other Bill. Can't remember a time when I wa'n't plumb loco."

Texas, his thoughts still detached, continued, "My pap was the best man God ever stuck into boots. Honest as sunshine. Liked fun. Made a pal of me. . . . We lived two miles north of Danby."

"Lead mining country! No range," and Bill spat in disgust.

Texas informed him, "But there's several long, thickly grassed valleys where the herd could go through and make the Missouri Pacific."

"Yeah, if them hombres would let us. But that ain't what makes you sit like a toad, all scrunched over."

"I was rememberin' how pap finished. We went to town—Danby—to tell Jedge Byenck that pap had found

a lead mine. That is, pap was goin' to tell if he found the jedge sober. I was to keep my yap shut if the jedge was on a drunk, or startin' one."

"I'm just t'other way 'round," eagerly interrupted Bill. "When they picked me up, drilled through by a Lipan Comanche arrer, I wouldn't tell my name, or outfit. Just shy in a mean way. . . . Your pap showed you the mine an' you kept shet?"

"Of course. I never was a talker. It's in a briery place, where I saw my first bear. I can see that ragged road an' feel the cool dirt under my bare feet, and hear the early mornin' bird-calls."

"You young poetry cuss!" exploded Bill.

"DANBY was filled with speculators, gamblers, outlaws then, as it must be now. Mighty bad hombres from all over. They was thick even afore the war. Well, we found the jedge sober. He wore the most glistenin' boots I ever see. Nearly jumped out of his chair when pap tossed the ore on the table, and let on how he'd found a lead mine. He clapped pap on the shoulder an' cried, 'Damme, Thomas Calm, if you ain't hit it! This is a big day. I must break over.'

"Then he was fishin' glasses an' a bottle from the table drawer. Pap took his drink, but put his ore in his pockets, an' winked at me. The jedge tossed off two more drinks and asked about the mine. Pap give me a side-look and said it was on the home place."

"Your name must be Calm," mused Bill.

"Washington Calm. But keep callin' me 'Texas.' I remember that mornin' like yesterday. It was the last time I was happy. . . . You *sabe*, the jedge would blab things when drunk. But it had to be told him jest as he was startin' in. He never toted anything over to the next drunk. And pap wouldn't take any chances. Hundreds of men in town who'd jump a claim and kill the owner in a second."

"Ornery road-brand you give them *caballeros*. But finish the drive."

"The jedge went along with us when we took to the street. Hoss Face come up an' dared pap to wrestle. They wrestled nearly every time they met—nip an' tuck atween 'em. Pap was keen for it, and the jedge said he'd be ref'ree.

"We went to an open shed with a dirt floor, with a heap of men follerin'. I held pap's coat. He winked at me as he always did when he reckoned on bestin' his man. Then they was at it. 'Round an' 'round they whirled, crowd pressin' closer, yellin' an' bettin'. Pap an' Hoss Face swung into the circle an' busted it. I nigh split my throat, a hootin' for pap to finish the job. Hoss Face went down on one knee, tryin' to fetch pap over his hip. Crowd then spoiled my chance of seein' anything. Men was howlin', 'Tom's got him bested!'"

"He musta been a humdinger," interrupted Bill.

"Then Jedge Byenck was swearin' at the crowd, an' tellin' 'em, 'Stand back! Give 'em a show! Tom's down! Fall back so they can go at it again!'" Texas paused and turned his head as if watching the poker game being played near by on a blanket by some Arkansas men and Northern gamblers. Bill kept quiet, respecting his silence.

Speaking rapidly and fiercely to cover his emotion, Texas went on:

"My heart was smashed, like I'd been kicked by a bucker, when some one cried, 'Tom's hurt!' He was hurt

to death. He died there on that dirt floor."

Texas jumped to his feet, fiercely winking back tears, and then hurried to interview his trail-boss. After a brief talk he roped out a horse, saddled it, and galloped across the line. Half a mile inside the State boundary he was halted by a man, armed with a double-barrel shotgun.

"You're from Texas, where the cow-fever comes from," challenged the guard.

"That fever's all in your eye."

"You got to go back."

"Bein' Missouri-born, I'm goin' ahead," said Texas.

The guard eyed him speculatively. His big gun, thrust through the waistband of the trousers, carried an argument. The huge hat, high-heeled boots, and big spurs, all spoke of Texas.

"How do I know you're a Missouri man?" asked the guard.

"I don't know, nor care. I'm goin' through. If you're curious, ask Jedge Byenck."

"Jedge Byenck? You're sound if he speaks for you. But he's in Danby."

"I was raised two miles above the town, on Hick's Run. Give me the road!"

"All right. You sound straight. But what's your name?"

"Washington Calm."

"Dawg-gone! Was any of your tribe that died in a wrestlin' match in the old days?"

"My pap died while wrestlin'."

TEXAS used the spurs and made quick time for the rest of the way. He found the town filled with speculators, miners, desperadoes, the backwash of the Civil War, but he scarcely was conscious of the colorful scene as he made for the square and dismounted on the north side. He found what he was looking for, the weather-beaten sign of Jonathan W. Byenck, attorney-at-law. The sign had been brave with much gilt paint when, as a boy, he had set out to find a new home.

Leaving his mustang at the hitch-rail he entered the office, his huge spurs making a great clatter. For a moment he did not recognize the judge, for his hair was white and his face thin and deeply creased. On the desk before him was a bottle and an empty glass. A glance, and the dark eyes of the judge were quickening with recognition. With both hands outstretched he quickly advanced and exclaimed:

"Bless my soul! Little Wash Calm grown up to be a man! What a big hat! You look like a wild cowboy."

He shook hands warmly and listened closely while his visitor gave a brief history of the lost years.

The judge nodded sympathetically, and insisted, "You must stop at my house while in town. I'm an old bach at present, but have a wonderful cook."

"I'm just driftin', Jedge. Shan't be in one place much. As pap's friend I 'lowed to look you up. An' there are some papers."

"Right here in my strong box. You shall take them with you. Better stop at my house. Your old place has burned down."

"They couldn't even spare the old shack?" mused Texas, his eyes narrowing. "Well, the soul of the house died when pap went away. I felt mighty lonesome stayin' there alone after pap was murdered."

"What?" exclaimed the judge. "Murdered? What a terrible thing to say! Why, Washington! There never was any proof of foul play. Why do you say that, my boy?"

"I squirmed like a rat between the legs of the men after some one cried, 'For God's sake keep the younker back.' There was no keepin' me back, Jedge. Pap was lying flat on his face, his arms flung wide. He'd been stabbed in the back on his left side, and his sheath-knife was on the ground two feet from him. He couldn't have fallen on the knife."

"But you never suggested foul play, Washington! Why have you waited until now to say it?"

"I was young and I was awfully scared. My heart was plumb busted. I had to light out. Now I'm older, I wanted to come back."

"And get your papers. Here they are, my boy. I'm sure you'd be better off if you could believe what others believe—that in some unaccountable fashion the knife fell to the ground, that your father fell upon it."

"I'd be a million times happier if I could think that, Jedge. Say, who could have wanted to kill him?"

"No one. He never had an enemy on earth. What you imagine is impossible."

Texas stuffed the thin parcel of legal papers in the bosom of his shirt and said noncommittally, "We won't talk any more about it, Jedge."

The judge sighed, and said, "If it had happened to-day, with so many rough characters in town, your suspicion wouldn't be so surprising."

"Rough characters here then, Jedge."

"But I believe we're worse off to-day. . . . Step here to the window. See that fellow dressed like a fashion-plate? Wearing boots of French calf; velvet collar on his coat, and a hat that cost more'n a nigger can earn in a year. Linen always white as snow, and the diamond in his shirt front is worth several thousand dollars. He's Eb Whilks. Got his thousand a month as a pilot on the Missouri till he was run off the river for killing a sleeping man. . . . There comes one you ought to remember, Jo Sling. He rode with Quantrill, and he fetched his killing notions back home. . . . And on the corner, there's old Hoss Face, who wrestled with your father that sad day."

"I'd know him anywhere," and Texas's voice was choked with emotion. "A kindly man. Who's the old coot behind him?"

"Laughin' Diggs. Crazy as a loon. See the ribbons dangling from his buttons. Always laughing and grinning, and talking to himself. But bad men ain't anything new to you, I reckon."

"We have our share in Texas. Now I'll be ridin'. See you again afore I pull out."

ON gaining the street Texas flew into a sudden rage at seeing a group of men around his mustang, laughing as Eb Whilks struck his hat close to the brute's nose. Each time he did it the mustang threw up his head, but did not attempt to bolt.

Texas roughly pushed his way through the group, snatched the hat from Whilks's hand and scaled it high in the air. He shot three bullets through it before it hit the ground. Turning to the startled owner, Texas snapped:

"I've got three shots left—an' I'll bet on myself quicker 'n I would on five aces!"

"Hit him in the head, Whilks, so he'll eat hay like a hoss!" yelled an onlooker.

"What the hell you mean, putting your dirty paws on my hat?" demanded Whilks.

"I don't like your hat or you; and I do like my pony."

"You don't know who I am. I'm Eb Whilks!"

"Yeah. Heard about you at Baxter Springs. They say you knifed a man up the river while he was asleep, an' had to make it a foot-race. Now you abuse a poor cow-pony."

"I'm unarmed," gritted Whilks. "Put up your gun. We'll settle this later—if you don't skip out."

"Kill the damn' cow-driver!" yelled a voice from the open door of the saloon. "Feed him lead candy!"

"He hasn't quit town yet," Whilks grimly tossed over his shoulder.

"I'm puttin' up my gun," said Texas. "I know you're wearin' one. I won't start to draw till yours is in the open. What say?"

"You haven't left town yet," repeated Whilks with deadly meaning; but he made no attempt to draw as he turned and entered the saloon, his bluff called.

Texas vaulted into the saddle and rode up the street, his body half turned so he might watch the saloon and the loafers in front of it. He kept a hand on his gun until the corner blocked his view.

He rode slowly, eager to catch each familiar bit of the landscape. His gaze quickened as he beheld a tall, gaunt woman, with a red bandanna handkerchief tied like a turban around her head, coming toward him. It seemed as if he had seen her but yesterday. He would have sworn she was wearing the same handkerchief she had worn ten years back. He used to be half afraid of her, because of the common belief she was a witch.

He reined in, but before he could speak she was quietly greeting:

"I knew I should meet you here, at this p l a c e and time, Washington Calm."

He dismounted and took both her wrinkled hands, and softly cried, "Mam Lize! Natural as life an' twice as han'some. Remember how you put a spell on me so nothing could hurt me, the night afore I pulled out?"

Her keen old eyes read him through. She said, "You've lived clean. You'll die clean. Nothing else matters. My spell has worked."

Rather bitterly he complained, "I wish some spell could have been put on poor pap."

"He died clean," she quietly replied. "All must die some time. He went clean. That's what really counts. . . . You've come back to see the old place. The cabin's been burned."

"Jedge Byenck told me. I shall miss the mornin'-glories."

"You can build there. Your pap would like to have you."

He shook his head.

She insisted, "Some time you will."

"I'm just a brush-popper, Mam Lize, a cow hand. Folks know me as 'Texas.' I'm goin' back. It's all I'm good for."

"Find a lead mine. Stay here," she urged.

He smiled sadly, and told her, "I can go straight to pap's mine." Then his dark eyes glowed brightly, and he whispered, "Show me the man who killed pap—then I'll stick here an' work that mine."

HE noticed she did not attempt to dissuade him from believing in foul play.

"You'll have the house facing just as the old one did," she said. "I have morning-glories, grown from the seed of those you knew as a boy. You shall have some."

He began to remember that Mam Lize was accounted peculiar to the point of dementia. The ignorant feared her; but all young people instinctively liked her. She abruptly turned into a woodland path and, over her shoulder, called back to him, "Around the next bend in the road you'll meet some one you know; one who pitied you when you lost your father. She cried much after you went away."

He rode on, deeply touched by her reference to his leave-taking, but not at all inclined to consider her words seriously. He rounded the bend at a gallop and beheld a young woman walking toward him. She was barefooted, and her dainty head was crowned with a mass of corn-yellow hair.

Instantly he was recalling the glory of her hair. Throwing himself from his horse he cried out:

"You remember me, Ellis Jones? You remember me?"

Much startled she halted and stared at him steadily, then she was exclaiming, "Washington Calm! Grown up to be a man!"

He was quite demoralized to have her burst into silent weeping as she gave him her hands.

"Good land, Ellis! Don't do that!" he begged.

"It's all so awfully sad," she piteously told him. "Many a night I've wondered where you were, and how the world was using you."

His tanned, defiant face softened. He awkwardly patted her hands, and confessed, "I've sometimes pitied that ornery little cuss myself. But let's talk about you. . . . Your ma used to make cookies with caraway seeds in 'em. She's livin'?"

"Dead. I'm living at the old place with my aunt."

"I remember her. She sang a heap at church meetin's. . . . I'm told our old place was burned."

"Some one burned it," she whispered. "Some one I know," she added in the same low tone.

"How they must have hated us!" he bitterly exclaimed.

"Or feared you. You must be very careful until you learn who's your friends."

"I'm pullin' out for Baxter Springs in a day or so."

She was visibly disappointed. "I was hoping you'd come to stay. To look for the lead-mine your father found. He must have found one. He gave mother a piece of ore that's rich in lead."

"Pap told me everything. I can go to it. I wanted to tell Jedge Byenck this mornin', but he'd been drinkin'. Ellis, I've promised the trail-boss I'd be back. But I'll try to come here again. On many lonely nights I'd 'a' felt a heap better if I'd known you remembered me."

"I shall always remember you, Wash. . . . Be careful—say nothing to anybody about the mine. . . . Now let's go to the house and I'll put on my shoes and stockings and be a lady. Then we'll walk to your old place. You'll see lots to remember."

"Ellis, I remember too much as it is. Danby hasn't changed, nor bettered much. Seems to be filled with bad-men and plain skunks. Hard work to rope out an honest man from the crowd I've seen so far."

"Judge Byenck is surely one," she reminded.

"One of two honest men here. Old Hoss Face is t'other. I must see him. Is there a third honest man?"

"Yes. Laughin' Diggs. But folks say he's crazy. Hoss Face is old. He

drinks too much. Make allowance for anything he says," she warned.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE CABIN.

TEXAS slept at the Jones cabin, and was off for town at an early hour, after promising to return by midday. He arrived before the gamblers were abroad; nor was Judge Byenck in his office. Leaving his mustang in front of the office, Texas commenced his search. He drifted from resort to resort and found most of them empty. He returned to the saloon nearest Byenck's office and was standing outside the door when a blowsy-looking man swaggered to a halt before him, and asked:

"Be you the younker Eb Whilks run out of town yesterday?"

"No. He didn't run me any."

"If you be you'd better be goin' faster'n the devil can whip a bear."

"Who are you?"

"Reckon you've heard my name. It's known from the end of Louisianny to the end of Texas. I'm Jo Sling."

The name was spoken impressively, and the owner waited.

Texas said, "Jo what?"

"Jo Sling. Damn your eyes, can't you hear?"

"Not with my eyes. Sling? Queer name. You must be a stranger in these parts."

"A stranger? Jo Sling a stranger!" The man's rage choked off further speech for the moment. He went for a gun and received a kick on the wrist that sent the weapon spinning.

"I don't believe your name's Sling —keep away from that gun!"

The man was cowed, although the cowboy had not drawn a weapon. Walking into the street Texas picked up the gun and carried it inside the saloon. He handed it to the bartender, and directed, "At ten thirty this morning you can hand this gun over to a man who calls himself Jo Sling."

"An' what if I give it to him now?"

"I'd feel sorry for both of you. But Mr. Sling won't take it now even if you offer it."

The bartender glared, and bawled, "Hi, Jo! Come git your gun!"

Sling came through the doorway, hesitated, then turned back. Over his shoulder he told the bartender, "I'll call for it later."

As he vanished from the scene Texas airily remarked, "Feller like him shouldn't be trusted with guns. I'm lookin' for Hoss Face. Ain't seen him for years."

"He comes in 'bout this time for a quencher," sullenly replied the bartender. Then, maliciously, "Be you the feller Eb Whilks dusted out of town yesterday?"

"You're the second hombre to ask me that. Sling was the first. If you'd been on deck yesterday you'd 'a' seen Mr. Whilks hivin' up to this bar, an' not interested in any man in the street. You can tell him I said I ain't left town yet."

"Eb Whilks can take a scut like you—"

"Take me like this?" cut in Texas; and he darted across the bar and caught the man's nose between two fingers and tweaked it smartly. "Don't pull away. There! That what you mean?"

THE barkeep rubbed his nose and wiped the water from his eyes, and said, "I got work to do. Can't stand here chinnin'."

"Well said, my son. Work keeps men out of trouble." Texas turned to

go, but the bartender detained him, sullenly saying:

"Here comes old Hoss Face now."

Desiring to talk privately with the man, Texas hastened to meet him outside the door. In a low voice he said, "Hoss Face, I'm Tom Calm's boy. Just back from Texas. I want to talk with you."

"Jumpin' hoppers! Little Wash Calm, growed up like a giant! An' totin' a he-man's gun! Talk? Reckon I'll talk my derned head off. Come inside while I appetize."

"Not here. Up along. I'll make the bar free to you." He linked arms with the old man and led the way to a more secluded saloon, where he bought a bottle of whisky and set it, and one glass, on a corner table.

"Pour yourself a house-warmer," he invited. "You remember that wrestlin'—"

"Don't!" groaned Hoss Face. "I still dream about it. God knows Tom an' me was prime friends. How could that thing 'a' happened, with his own knife?"

Texas waited until two more drinks were gulped down; then he reminded: "Some folks say his knife fell out of his belt, that he fell on it."

"All a derned lie!" spluttered Hoss Face, forgetting his first expression of merely suspecting foul play. "I was goin' to ask him to put his knife aside when we started. But it wa'n't in the way of just a friendly scuffle. He pitched into me afore I could say anything even if I'd wanted to. The crowd got too close. We swerved near a post. Your pap had me 'round the middle an' was breakin' me over. He swung me 'round to keep me clear of the post. I slumped down to bust his hold an' fetch him over my hip."

He paused and rattled the neck of the bottle against the glass until he had poured another stout dram.

"You saw something?" whispered Texas.

Hoss Face advanced his lips close to the waddie's ear and murmured: "I see a hand come 'round the post. It grabbed at your pap's back. I see it snatch the knife. Just the hand, mind you. I see a tiny white line, like a scar, on the second knuckle of the thumb where the hide was drawn tight by grippin' at the haft. It happened in a jiffy! I can see it any time, all the time. Never dared yip a word then. I'd been killed."

"You saw the blow struck?" hoarsely prompted Texas.

Hoss Face shook his head. "But I felt your pap weaken. I swung him over my hip and he sprawled out on his face. I never dreamed he was mortal hurt. If I'd had time to think I'd 'lowed some one grabbed the knife so he wouldn't fall on it an' bruise hisself."

"That's all, Hoss Face. My pap was murdered. But I'll tell no one what you've said. I've a thousand in gold down in Texas I'll give to learn who grabbed that knife."

"An' I couldn't tell you for a million," whispered the broken man. "I've looked for that hair-like white line on thumb knuckles ever since. I reckon it don't show if the hide ain't strained by grippin' something. As you kindly said, I ain't told you nothin'. If I'd bleated a word of this, in as tough a town as Danby, I'd woke up dead long ago."

TEXAS had been convinced from the beginning that his father was the victim of an assassin. He knew the chances of discovering the murderer, even be he alive, were most

remote. Few of the spectators of that fatal match were alive. The Civil War had intervened to account for some; old age, disease and violence had whittled down the remainder.

What had puzzled him and had blocked any definite inquiry through officers of the law was the entire lack of motive. His father had been one of the most popular men in the county. He had kept out of politics and had participated in no feuds. It remained a black mystery.

He allowed Hoss Face twenty minutes' start and then made for his mustang. Seeing Judge Byenck in his office, he entered to give him greeting.

"I'm mighty glad to see you, Wash," said the judge. "But I'm peeved you won't put up at my place."

"Just been movin' 'round. Got to be headin' back soon. Met Jo Sling this mornin'. He's got the notion he thinks he's tough."

"He's tough, and very dangerous," warned the judge.

"He might do drivin' the drag, but never on the point. Looks to me like a man who's sold his saddle."

The judge went to the door and glanced out to make sure there were no listening ears. Lowering his voice he explained, "Jo Sling, standing on his own feet, doesn't amount to a damn. He'll kill in a second if he can get the advantage; but that doesn't make him dangerous. It's the crowd he herds with."

"Reg'lar outfit of 'em, huh?"

"Organization would be the better word. You hit one and you hit all. You might kill one, or two, but you can't kill all."

"Who's the head killer?"

"Ah, my boy, if we knew that there wouldn't be any organization. We'd lynch the leader. As a lawyer, accustomed to undertake the defense of any man, criminal or honest, I can't try to purify Danby. It's one of the toughest towns in the State. No rascal can afford to kill *me,* as sometime he may need me to defend him. Yet I never take the street without these pieces of jewelry in my waistcoat pockets." From each of the two lower pockets he extracted a derringer of murderous bore. "Now, Wash, both as a lawyer knowing criminals, and as your friend, I want to give you some good advice."

"That I'd better pull out for Baxter Springs," interposed Texas.

The judge bowed his head. Then he summed up, "You've won the ill will of Whilks and Sling. I heard about your run-in with Sling when I came down to the office. Wash, I earnestly advise you to ride for it before the organization can snag you."

"I'm likely to pull out pretty soon. But what does this gang do to make a profit?"

"I've defended them for stealing cattle and horses, for jumping lead claims, and for counterfeiting Northern greenbacks. Also for the crime of manslaughter."

"Texas folks won't take any paper money. Too many Confederate bills down there. Mexicans won't take it, either."

"Nor will our folks here in Danby touch it. But Northerners prefer it to gold. That makes the game safer for the gang. Money has to travel East before it's found out to be bogus. Our criminal class goes on the old theory that dead men can't talk."

"THANKS, anyway, Jedge. I'll be ridin' pretty soon; an' Baxter Springs ain't no piece of heaven. . . . Queer that pap should be killed just after finding a mine."

"He had excellent specimens, Washington. But I could find nothing on your land. As your lawyer, and, in a way of speaking, your guardian, I put down test pits after some miscreant fired your cabin. There were traces aplenty, but no body of ore. Your pap must have picked up his specimens in the hills somewhere."

He paused and produced a bottle and two glasses. Texas shook his head. The judge drank a brimming glass, neat. Texas wished he might confide in him, but he was remembering his father's advice. The judge was apt to talk unwisely when under the influence of liquor.

"I'll be takin' a *pasear* back to the 'run' an' then to the Springs. Found some old neighbors left. Ellis Jones has grown to be a young lady."

"Remarkably handsome girl," endorsed the judge, his gaze quickening. "Fit to grace any station once she's removed from Hick's Run."

"An' there's Mam Lize."

"She's a damn' nuisance," said the judge, testily. "She stirs folks up. Can't get a nigger to work within a mile of her."

Texas took to the sidewalk, and his pony, in the road, kept abreast of him. When at the end of the street, and beyond Whilks's favorite saloon, he whistled and the pony came to him. He finished the distance to the Run at a smashing gallop, and dismounted at the Jones cabin. Ellis was quick to appear in the doorway to welcome him.

"Any one try to bother you?" she asked in quick concern.

"Only Sunday-school folks," he lightly replied. "What say to a ride out to the place of briers in the Rainy Hills?"

"I'm ready now. Lunch packed."

"I'll start afoot. You follow on my pony. He's used to a loose rein and a few pats on the neck."

"You're thinking we'll be followed?"

"I really don't; not to-day. Later, yes. Give me half an hour and then come hot-foot. . . . Judge Byenck spoke real handsome of you."

She blushed and made a little curtsy. "He'll be going to Congress after the carpet-baggers clear out. He'll find him a handsome wife there."

Leaving his mustang, Texas went alone to the place of briers, where he had seen his first bear. The spot had not changed, he thought, except for a narrow trail that led back into a fold of the hills. It had not been there in his boyhood.

"Hossmen been out here quite a bit," he mused in surprise, as he stared at the trace.

Then came Ellis Jones, imitating bird-calls. He hurried to meet her and found her quite resplendent in a flower-besprigged dress and a beflowered bonnet. It was her best apparel and but poorly suited for the place of briers.

"Folks been out here, quite a bit," he remarked as he helped her from the saddle.

The trail puzzled her, too, and her questing gaze followed its winding course until it dipped from sight behind a ridge.

"It's the first I knew this was a short cut to any place," she remarked. "There's nothing beyond except your land."

Leaving the mustang the two followed the narrow trail clear of the bush-growth, and over the ridge. They found the track continuing into and across the valley. It seemed to end in a growth of oaks. Texas, in the lead, suddenly halted and, pointing to the

oaks, whispered, "What in tarnation does that mean?"

SHE stepped back into cover and drew him with her. He, too, had heard it: the sound of a door closing. Instinctively secretive, both crouched low and waited. Texas did not relish concealment on his own land; but the girl pleadingly touched a finger to her lips.

Texas was quick to diagnose a new sound, that of a horse walking toward them. Soon the head and shoulders of a man showed above the bushes; the rider was Eb Whilks. He pricked his mount into a gallop and cantered up the slope and over the ridge.

"What next?" whispered the girl. "Take a peek at the cabin?"

"Why not? It's on my land."

"Other men may be there."

"I own this land," he said harshly, and his hand dropped on his gun.

He led the way toward the half concealed structure, and no longer made any attempt at secrecy. The house, solidly built of logs, was long enough for two cabins. The windows were of glass and were protected, in a measure, by bars of oak. Staring between the bars, his big hat shading the glass, Texas remained silent for nearly a minute. The girl asked him what he was seeing.

"Bunks for eight or ten men. T'other end is partitioned off. I'm mighty curious to see what's in the back end."

"You'll go in?" she asked. There was shivery expectancy in her voice.

"Why not? It's my house because it's on my land. But I'd rather not let folks know we've been here. May be more in this than just jumping a man's land."

He passed to the windows of the shut-off portion and found them covered with thick slabs. Spying through crevices was made impossible by inside curtains of black cloth.

"Now I know I'm going to get inside this place," he whispered. "You hide out in the trees. If you see or hear anything, caw like a crow."

"I'd rather you wouldn't," she protested. "But—I'd like to go along with you."

He smiled in understanding and motioned her toward the protective cover. She hastened to conceal herself while he experimented with the door. It was secured by a staple and padlock. He solved the problem by finding a discarded ramrod and using it as a lever in withdrawing the staple.

Once inside, with the door closed behind him, he hastened half the length of the interior and came to a second door. This also was secured by staple and padlock. He again used the ramrod and stood on the threshold of a room that was in shadows.

An oil-lamp hung from a cross-beam, but he did not light it. Once his eyes became used to the semi-darkness he discovered a small printing press. Beside this was a small trap door, which he proceeded to open. Reaching down one hand, his fingers encountered packages of paper, seemingly of equal width and length. Fishing out one of these he was amazed to behold what purported to be greenbacks.

"Counterfeiters!" he softly exclaimed. "Workin' on my land. Damn' skunks!"

He scarcely had finished his little soliloquy before a shrewd scheme for running the cattle through the southwestern part of the state, past these blockading outlaws and highwaymen, was forming in his quick mind.

Further examination revealed all the

bills were tens, with fifty in each package. He took ten packages, then replaced the trap and left the room.

Driving the staple back with the butt of his gun he soon had the door as he had found it. He repeated the process at the outside door after dropping his plunder in an old gunnysack.

THE girl came running to join him, eagerly asking questions. He hushed her with lifted hand and quickly led the way up the ridge, but not along the trail. He crossed the ridge some distance east of the trail and descended to the valley on a long diagonal.

He soon found his horse and lifted the girl into the saddle. He walked ahead, leading the way farther east, and came to an open valley that extended northeast. His eyes glittered as he imagined it filled with Texas cattle. Swinging south in a wide curve he continued his detour until back of the Jones cabin.

Slipping to the ground Ellis Jones fiercely demanded, "Will you talk now?"

"Just achin' to, young lady." He rapidly recounted what he had done and found.

"They'll know some one stole them," she warned.

"But the locks are in place. They won't suspect nothin' until they count their money. Then they'll suspect each other. Mebbe Whilks was up there alone to git some, sort of private-like. Every man in the outfit must have a key to the outside door. They can't suspect us."

"But why did you take any of the miserable stuff? You wouldn't use it to cheat folks?"

"Now, now—"

"I know you wouldn't, Washington. You always was an honest little boy."

"Only to cheat cheaters. I'd use it for that, mebbe. These outlaws are skunks. Any game is fair to play on 'em. Fight the devil with fire. I must git back to Baxter Springs in a rush."

"Oh! I hoped—thought you would stay on the Run for a while."

"But I'm comin' back, Ellis. Some day I'm comin' back for good. I'm goin' to work that mine."

"Why not now?"

"They wouldn't let me. Got to be some house-cleanin' b e f o r e honest folks can do much work."

"You'll see and talk with Judge Byenck before you do anything? He's for law and order."

Texas became grave as he explained. "I want to tell him things, but I don't dast to. Pap warned me when I was a younker how the jedge would babble things when on a drunk. I must play my own game until I need him as a lawyer. Then he can talk all he wants to."

He went with her to the house and was glad to find her aunt absent. He stuffed a portion of the bogus money into his boots and concealed the remainder about his person. He chuckled and said, "If anything bumps me hard I'll sorter scatter money all over the country. Don't be s'prised if you hear the rattle of longhorns up this way, poppin' like pistols. If we can make Sedalia, the herd's all right, an' then I may turn lead-miner."

"If only Judge Byenck wouldn't talk!" she sighed.

"A man carries too much extry weight that does that. We use most of our breath for breathin', down in Texas. Now I'm strikin' due west, hittin' the line north of the Springs." He paused, then said in a lower tone,

"Ellis—It'd help a heap if you could say you'd wait for me."

"I'll wait, Wash," she whispered.

CHAPTER III.

A RISKY GAME.

HE rode that afternoon several miles north of the town, and through unfrequented ways. He crossed the Missouri-Kansas line a mile above his outfit, and attracted no attention as he galloped south.

His first business was to secure the attention of Bill, and this required much finesse as his fellow brush-popper was winning at poker. Two minutes of talk aside caused Bill to forget the game, and his weathered face reflected a continuing satisfaction.

"It's too tarnal good to be true!" exclaimed Bill. "Cuss th' luck! Why couldn't I been along? What next?"

"I must talk with the boss. None of the boys must know anything about it; only you, the boss, an' me. *Sabe?*"

"*Sí, señor.* Go it, you young devil!"

The trail-boss was in the depths of despair. The congestion of cattle exceeded anything ever experienced in the history of the cattle trade. He was curt and inclined to be explosive when Texas insisted on a private audience.

"Keep your young troubles to home. I've got more'n I can stagger under," he growled.

"You just got to listen, boss!"

"Yaah? Listen to hear how glad the home folks was to see you. Clear out! I'd be a dangerous man for even John Wesley Hardin to trifle with, just now."

"But you just got to listen. How do you like the looks of those?" And he displayed several ten-dollar greenbacks.

"Forty dollars! Damsite more'n the old man will make out of this drive. Clear out afore I spile a good gun-barrel over your thick head."

"But I've got lots of this—"

"Yankee money," sneered the boss. "No one in Texas will touch it."

"It's good as gold with the government behind it," softly insisted Texas. "I've got five thousand in that sort of money. Boss, Bill an' me will buy this Missouri crowd an' git a road through to Sedalia."

"What train or bank have you two scuts been triflin' with?" harshly demanded the boss.

"Wrong guess. When the game opens, have the boys understand it's the most tarnal hustlin' game they was ever up against. Put me on the right point, you goin' ahead with the chuck-wagon an' the horses—the *remuda.* Give us two days an' we'll be clear of this mess an' so far toward Sedalia all hell can't turn us back."

The boss's eyes began to glow. With the toe of his boot Texas drew an imaginary map of the country north and east of Danby.

"I know it, Texas," impatiently broke in the boss. "I was over it afore they put up the bars. But where'd you git that money?"

Texas glanced around to reassure himself of privacy, and whispered, "It's make-believe money. I found where they was makin' it. Helped myself. The folks that git it will be simply takin' in what they themselves were plannin' to pass on poor, unsuspectin' critters. No one knows I have it."

The boss drew a deep breath. Hope and a sardonic humor began to sparkle in his deep-set gray eyes. He said, "If this game works you can have anything the old man has."

"Bill an' me will begin work to-morrer. Now, best begin fetchin' the cattle in closer to the line. Day after to-morrer, perhaps sooner, oughter see us on the trail."

"I'll have the steers ready, fit to win a foot race, Texas."

"Bill an' me are goin' out a ways an' dirty up this money. Looks too new."

"Texas, I'm goin' to fix it to-morrer so folks will be slow to wipe you out if they catch you in a jam. I'm goin' to use my right to draw on the old man an' put a credit of a thousand dollars in the bank what will be paid to the man who kills any man who kills you."

It required half a minute for the full significance of this arrangement to penetrate Texas's understanding. Then a slow smile lightened his usually taciturn face. He softly said, "Boss, that is the humdingest plan any hombre ever thought up. There ain't one in that crooked outfit who wouldn't kill any other man in it for half that money; an' any man who'd want to kill me would know he was just setting a price on his own head!"

"I'll start for Danby at sunrise to fix it," promised the trail boss.

"Bill an' me will make a early start an' git busy in buyin' trail-rights," Texas jubilantly assured him.

TEXAS was accompanied by Bill on his next visit to Danby, the day after the trail-boss had gone alone to town. Leaving Bill outside Judge Byenck's office, Texas entered and was warmly greeted. After the handshaking was finished, the judge said:

"What's this business about your boss arranging with the bank to pay money to the man who kills your murderer? Never heard of such a thing before."

"Oh, he got fidgety. He reckoned some one here might be rubbin' me out. He thinks he needs me in the outfit. Funny notion of his, yet a pretty good idea. A thousand dollars is a lot of money."

"It should thoroughly protect you even in this rather rough community, my boy. But it's a cruel shame that the son of one of our old citizens has to fear for his life, when he comes back home."

"Sorter low-down," agreed Texas. "But lots of new folks have blown in here since I was a kid. You understand, Jedge, that reward money was the boss's notion, not mine. I can take care of myself."

"Not against a bullet from behind," moodily corrected the judge. "But who could wish any harm to come to you?"

"Eb Whilks would laugh right out loud if he heard I was dead. So would Jo Sling. Either one of 'em would pot me in a second if he dared. I had a run-in with each of 'em when I was in town before, an' Whilks as good as vowed he'd git me."

"He'll think and talk differently now," grimly assured the judge. "What's doing now? Another holiday while your boss tries to decide what he'll do with the herd?"

"I've thought of a way out of it, Jedge."

"Go along! How can that be?"

"First, we have twenty-five hundred prime steers that will be worth nothing if they ain't moved soon. Baxter Springs for miles 'round is grazed out. T'other herds comin' along make it worse. We can't move west. We can't drive back into the Injun Nation."

"That's true," regretted the judge.

"And if you enter the Nation the Indians will steal all your cattle, or tax you outrageously. Even-Stephen. But what's your notion of undoing this sad business?"

"Buy our way through southwestern Missouri to Sedalia."

The judge whistled softly; then warned, "But that would take a heap of money."

"We'll pay five thousand dollars for an open trail for our herd," said Texas.

"Gold?"

"No, no. Can't be gold. We've been that desperate that we've sold some steers to Northern men. They had nothin' but paper money. The old man back on the home-ranch, had considerable paper money that ain't worth a hoot down there. He sent that along with the outfit. That's just what we've got; five thousand dollars in greenbacks."

The judge grimaced, and said, "Of course I know it's sound as wheat. But folks down here, as in Texas, hate greenbacks. The war made us all shy of paper money. We're still remembering our Confederate money."

"You reckon the toughs won't take paper money?" asked Texas, his voice uneasy.

"Oh, they'll take it. But they'll want to discount it a lot."

"THEY can call the five thousand anything they want to if they'll let us drive our herd through," said Texas sourly. "But five thousand is all we have. United States greenbacks are worth a hundred cents on the dollar if they're taken to St. Louis... See here, Jedge—an' this is my real business with you—why can't you fix it for us? You're a lawyer. You've defended lots of these hombres. You must know 'em. You can handle it."

Byenck shook his head and firmly said, "Even the devil is entitled to having his rights protected in court. I do defend these roughs. But I can't stamp with my approval this sort of bribery. If you were buying a right of way from the state, that would be different. You're filling the pockets of our worst citizens. They know the Texas fever can't hurt anything through this region, but they use that as an excuse to extort money. It will set up a bad precedent."

Texas looked greatly disappointed.

Byenck walked to the window and back; then said, "I'm mighty sorry, my boy. But I'd be *particeps criminis*, a partner in a crime. I'd be encouraging extortion, bribery, blackmail, whatever you choose to call it. But I understand your hard position. I can't blame you for making every effort to save the herd. I sympathize with you."

"Sympathy won't save our herd, Jedge. See here: Is there a man I can go to an' pay the money, an' have him arrange it so it will stay fixed?"

Byenck stared at the ceiling and was silent for a minute. Then he said, "Whilks is your man. If he agrees to take your money, he'll pay off his friends and your herd will go through."

"An' I've shot his nice new hat full of holes!" sighed Texas.

"He can buy several new hats with his share of the money," dryly reminded Byenck.

Texas's overcast face brightened. "I'll hunt him up *pronto*. May have to lay a gun on him till I can explain things."

"He's in his favorite saloon. He may shoot at sight."

"With a thousand goin' to the man who nails *him?*"

"Dawg-gone! I was forgetting that, my boy."

"None of Whilks's crowd will forget it. An' there's not one of 'em who wouldn't pop over his own dad in a second for half that money. All right, Jedge; an' thank you."

TEXAS rejoined Bill and briefly explained the situation, and added, "That's the way the game lays, Bill. You go in first an' stand beside him. He's the slickest dresser at the bar. Git his attention till I can drift close. Lay a gun on him if he tries to act up. Then I'll gentle him."

Bill nodded, quite happy over his part in the maneuver. With straddling gait he bore down on the saloon nearest the law-office and entered. He heard a voice say something about a "damn' herder," but for once he was impervious to insults. He recognized Whilks with one sweep of his gaze down the long bar. The man was standing at the lower end and facing the open door.

Bill advanced and walked behind him. Whilks instantly faced about and glared at him s u s p i c i o u s l y, and growled:

"You got the whole state of Missouri to drink in. What you crowding alongside of me for?"

Whilks felt something pressing against his thigh. He glanced down and saw the six-shooter Bill had drawn under cover of the bar.

"You be a little gentleman, stranger," murmured Bill. "Got a little business deal to put up to you. You behave till my partner comes to explain. Make a move an' I'll spile your person. Wait, an' listen to my friend, an' you'll want to kiss me after it's all over."

Beads of sweat dotted Whilks's forehead. Both his arms were resting on the bar.

"A damn' trap!" he muttered.

"No trap at all. Just my visitin' card. Here comes my friend now. He comes with a peace-pipe. If we meant you mortal hurt, it wouldn't take two of us. My friend wants you to do something for him, an' he's willin' to pay high for it."

Whilks glanced toward the door and beheld Texas swinging in, the big gun disquietingly in evidence. "He'll pay high for what I'm goin' to do for him," rasped Whilks.

"Don't forgit that thousand blood-money—an' the joker I'm holdin'," warned Bill.

Texas came down the line. The curious patrons turned their heads and watched his advance on Whilks with keen interest and expectancy. Then, one by one, they began drifting away from the bar, some to take to the streets, the more resolute to seat themselves at small tables at the back of the big room.

Without any preamble, Texas, his arms resting on the bar, began:

"Whilks, we don't like each other, but I have some business you can handle for me. Jedge Byenck said you was the hombre for me to go to. This means money for you—while if I'm rubbed out it means a thousand dollars cash for the man who gets my killer."

"I've heard about that," mumbled Whilks. "But I didn't believe it."

"It's true. But let's git down to my boss's business. I'm here talkin' for him. His cattle will be a dead loss if they ain't driven to market, *pronto*. If you'll fix it for him to drive the herd through to hit the Missouri Pacific, somewhere near Sedalia, I'll hand you five thousand dollars. What say?"

Whilks was nonplused. "What sort of a gum-game is this?" he managed to ask.

"It's a five thousand dollar gum-game. Our herd's worth nigh to a hundred thousand if we can git 'em to the railroad, quick. They're prime stock an' should bring forty dollars a head, easy. Twenty-five hundred odd of 'em, all steers. They'll drive twice as fast as a mixed herd an' give no trouble on the drag. Now, can you make the trail safe for 'em? We shall put 'em through mighty fast."

WHILKS fanned his steaming face with his soft hat, and his eyes grew lurid as he beheld the bullet holes. But the thousand in the bank, waiting to be paid over for the body of the slayer of this offensive cow-waddie, was a deterrent to action. Nor was Whilks's share of the proffered five thousand dollars to be lightly ignored. Clapping on his hat he gruffly said:

"You stay here. You say you've talked with Byenck. I want to talk with him."

"We'll be here, calmly drinkin' beer," assured Texas. "Just tell your friends not to take no pot shots at us."

Whilks's lips twisted into a vicious grin, and he answered, "They know about that b l o o d-m o n e y, too. Damnedest notion I ever heard of!"

He swaggered out to the street and the two cow hands ordered beer and drank contentedly. After some fifteen minutes Whilks r e t u r n e d, walking smartly. He advanced on the pair and nodded his head, saying, "I can pass the word to-day. Free trail for your herd. We'll have men watching to see no other herd hogs in. When do you wish to work the riffle? An' when do I get the money? I must pay off a heap of the boys."

"We can start 'em day after to-morrer," spoke up Bill. "Our herd's nearest the line. We'll pass north of this burg an' make a forced drive the first day."

"Then be at the line early in the morning, day after to-morrow. And the money?"

"I'll have it ready for you before a steer crosses the line," promptly promised Texas.

They parted, and the two waddies took to the street and swung into the saddle, and never once looked behind them. By this time the whole town knew of the unique life-insurance Texas was carrying. When the pair were on the outskirts of the village, Laughin' Diggs halted them by standing in the road and waving his tattered hat.

"What's the matter, old pard?" demanded Bill.

"He's crazy," whispered Texas; and then, aloud, "Good mornin', Mr. Diggs."

"Laughin' Diggs," corrected the eccentric, and he laughed infectiously until he had to wipe the tears from his eyes. The two travelers guffawed in sympathy.

"No one shoots *me,* along of my bein' queer," said Diggs. "An' they don't dast shoot *you,* along of the heap of money in the bank. But I've been thinkin'." He was addressing his remarks to Texas, and the latter nodded for him to finish.

"I was thinkin' why some of our town smarties don't shoot you an' then kill some man that ain't got any friends an' swear he done for you."

"He may be crazy, but he ain't nobody's old fool," said Bill in a low voice.

Texas frowned slightly and told the eccentric, "That game won't work. Genuine proof that the man killed was the hombre who wiped me out must

be made at the bank. Can't be no guessin' about it. No takin' Whilks's, or Jo Sling's say-so."

"Folks down this way can lie themselves out of Tophet," continued Diggs. "I got a bad place in my head, makes life seem funny to me. But I ain't crazy although my head is queer. You watch your step, young feller."

CHAPTER IV.

RUNNING THE BLOCKADE.

DURING the remainder of the ride Texas was silent much of the time. Bill shrewdly guessed the tenor of his thoughts and encouraged, "It 'll soon be good-by to this chunk of country. Our boys will see no one pots you without showin' hisself."

"I wasn't chewin' over that entirely, Bill. But as Diggs says, some outfit down here could play that game. Name a man they didn't like as the one who had done for me. But what's worryin' me most just now is the chance of Whilks seein' that our money is the funny kind."

"Not in a full moon!" Bill firmly assured. "It's been shook up in a dirty bag an' is crumpled an' creased. It was too good a lookin' job at first; but now it looks just like the greenies them Northerners play poker for."

When they reached their camp they found the trail-boss had developed a bad case of nerves. He took Texas aside and eagerly listened to his report.

"Once we git started, we got to go through with it," the boss told him. "There can't be any turnin' back. If the money don't set right, we've got to shoot our way through an' save what steers we can. I've hired eight extry men from other outfits, whose owners can't use 'em. Steers must go through even if they spot our game."

"Once we've covered twenty miles an' are well north of Danby we'll have the worst of it behind us," Texas advised him. "The whole drive's about two hundred miles as I figure it. There are several long, grassy valleys where we can slow down an' make up for the feed the herd loses at this end. Good water all the way. Let me ride right point an' have Bill pointin' on the left. Put all the new hands on the drag."

Herd owners and trail bosses had noticed the unusual activities about the Three-Diamond outfit's camp, and were trying to guess why extra hands had been hired. The shrewd trail boss permitted them to believe that the herd was to travel north along the Kansas-Missouri line up to Fort Scott. The next day saw the cattle being driven toward the Missouri line, with the outlying bunches being thrown into one big mass. The dust and rattling of horns evidenced some radical action; and desperate owners vainly besieged the Three-Diamond foreman to learn if there was any advantage in which they might participate.

Early in the morning of the appointed day there was a definite movement toward the line. The trail boss and Texas came up on the right point.

Some fifty men, heavily armed, guarded the Missouri border. When he got within a quarter mile of these men Texas galloped ahead, carrying a gunnysack across his saddle. He spotted Whilks in the foreground and rode up to him.

Texas had no reason to believe the bogus money had been missed from the hidden cabin. Whilks's face was screwed up in a frown, but that was his habitual expression. Handing down the sack, Texas said:

"Here it is."

Whipping out a bowie-knife and slitting the bag, Whilks cried, "Hold back those damn cattle until I can count it."

"Count it fast, then. Twenty-five hundred beeves make a lot of pressure, an' we must go through a flukin', or they'll bull an' stampede."

WHILKS rapidly examined the money, counting a thousand of it out in small sums, and calling each henchman by name to advance and receive his pay.

"Looks like it had been all over hell's half acre," he told Texas in a loud voice, for the din of the approaching herd was rapidly increasing.

The chuck-wagon came up, the "old man" wearing a gun with several notches. He yelled, "Damnation! Give us the trail, we can't hold 'em!"

He passed on before any one could remonstrate. Whilks lifted his head to survey nearly two miles of steers traveling smartly. "Reckon it's all here, boys. If it ain't we'll collect with interest later." And the "guard" fell back to give the surging herd the right of way. The *remuda* passed on a mad gallop, seven extra horses for each herder. And Texas was racing back to take his position on the right point.

Over the line swept the head of the drive. The Missourians reappeared, to ride along the flanks and prevent other herds from joining in the drive.

Rival owners and trail bosses were cursing and shouting and desperately endeavoring to make last minute arrangements for a right of way. But the great din reduced their outcries to grimaces.

Spurring up beside Texas the trail boss cried, "It worked! Damme, Texas, if it didn't work!"

Drawn of face, Texas nodded and wondered how long before Whilks and his followers would discover the truth. Texas had sketched a rough map of the route for the boss. The course he had selected would pass through the long valley down which he and Ellis Jones had ridden after the raid on the counterfeiters' cabin.

He considered this patch of the route the worst danger zone as the movement of the herd might draw the lawbreakers to their cabin. Did this happen, it might follow that the cache of money would be inspected and found to be short. But it was the most direct route, and Texas knew to shift the course radically would arouse suspicion.

Ordinarily the herd would be driven slowly and allowed to graze through the early hours, while kept gently moving in the right direction. This time, the normal order was reversed and the cattle were pushed.

As the herd strung out, the natural leaders forged to the front; gaunt steers that never would be content to loiter with the drags. Since this was not a mixed herd, the drag-drivers had less to do, their work consisting mainly of turning back chronic bolters. Steers that had formed the habit of bolting from the herd were shot down to prevent stampedes.

Through brush and broken country the long line was maneuvered, and when it came time for the usual rest and plenty of water they were urged on. The men on the point kept the head a little east of north. One great advantage in the nature of the country traveled was the absence of any "big swimmin's." Considering the country, all trail records were broken by the time the weary animals were halted for grass and water in the long valley.

Texas, tired in every muscle and joint, dully wondered how he could see Ellis Jones after the drive was completed. With Whilks ultimately discovering how he had been tricked with his own bogus greenbacks, Texas was certain no amount of "blood" money in the world would serve to protect him. With the drive finished, however, Texas knew he would return to Hick's Run, let the odds against him be ever so great.

ONLY the trail boss, Texas, and Bill sensed the drama of the situation. The rest of the outfit were carefree, believing real money had bought the right of way. They wondered why there should be such great haste in making Sedalia.

The long hours of daylight were used to the full. When the herd entered the grassy valley, down which Texas and Ellis Jones had fled after their visit to the counterfeiters' cabin, there was no fear of a stampede. The weary cattle crowded along the run and drank their fill, grazed a bit, and then lay down.

The night-herders rode along their flanks, singing dolorous songs, while others sat on their horses above and below the herd. The continuous crooning of the singers completed what exhaustion had commenced, and the herd slept.

The "old woman," a grizzly, grouchy, deadly specimen of humanity despite his misnomer, dished up grub from his chuck-wagon. He rejoiced in an abundant supply of firewood. The caboose or "coony"—an apron of hide stretched under the wagon to hold what stray bits of wood might be picked up in plains country—was not drawn upon. The barrel of water, resting inside the wagon-bed with the spigot protruding through the side of the bed, was emptied and filled with fresh water from the creek. Under such conditions the cook was almost human.

Cattle will not stampede so long as they can hear the reassuring voices of their herders, and the timbered ridges on each side of the valley discouraged wandering from the bedding ground. Two men were stationed a mile down the valley, one in the rear and one on each side. These were to guard against surprise attacks. The men could not understand why such precautions should be taken after the boss had bought the right of way.

Early in the morning the night-herders came in to snatch a bit of sleep. The day men went on duty and the old woman served breakfast and, followed by the *remuda,* pulled out to be ready for the midday meal.

Before sunrise the herd was up and grazing. The guards from the rear came in and reported all quiet. The drag drivers took their positions. The long line was started moving, and the clattering of hoofs and the rattling and popping of the longhorns drowned the sound of early bird-calls and reduced conversation to gestures.

Along the top of the inclosing ridges rode horsemen who were to look for men coming in haste and on mischief bent. For the first three miles the herd moved leisurely, grazing as they advanced. Then the pace was increased, although it was more difficult to accelerate the herd on this lush grass than if the trail had been hard-packed earth. At the end of seven miles the herd went to water and were allowed to lie down and rest during the noon-day heat.

Texas, nervously alert and picturing many dangers, was for pushing the herd along, but the boss insisted noth-

ing would be gained by such ill-advised haste. Also, he wished the herd to take advantage of the rich grazing so they might be in good flesh at the end of the drive. He estimated the first day's drive was thirty miles. He planned to cover twenty miles on the second day, and to average fifteen miles for the remainder of the drive.

ONLY a miracle could permit the repetition of the first twenty-four hours' penetration of the country. Small creeks could be death-traps did the herd crowd down into them too precipitately. And it was difficult to get the head of the herd out of the water and on the trail again, and to round up half a mile of the thirsty creatures fringing the western bank.

Stubborn leaders had to be roped and violently urged to mount the farther bank. The men on the flanks crossed the cattle and then drove them into what was to be the trail. The drag-drivers collected all strays and kept the rear of the line in motion. To those who had popped cattle out of the jungles of southwest Texas, this work was not arduous, but the new hands who were used to driving in open country found much to learn.

Day after day, however, the herd forged on, the chuck-wagon and the *remuda* always on hand when needed; and always ahead when the straggling files were in motion.

Citizens of the State appeared occasionally and complained that their cows and oxen had been absorbed by the drive. When there was definite proof of such assertions, the boss made a settlement. When there was doubt, the complainant was generously told to go in and pick out his property and remove it. None of the latter class cared to venture among the milling cattle.

Many such complaints were so many hold-ups, and the trail-crew was hard to bluff.

Every now and then a sheriff appeared and ordered the drive to be turned back; but there was no turning back two miles of longhorns. By cajolery, defiance, and a judicious payment of claims, the herd was kept moving in the right direction.

The country people as a whole, however, realized the herd could not have crossed the line without the permission of the Newton County men. The drive left considerable money among those who had eggs, butter, bread and milk to sell. Although there were threats, much grumbling and occasional shots fired from a distance, each day saw the herd nearing its destination.

At last came the great day, the day when final arrangements were made with the railroad to ship the steers east; the day when the trail-boss clapped a hand on Texas's shoulder and said:

"Young feller, it worked! Damme if we didn't put it through! The Old Man should make you a handsome present. It's made you lots of enemies in southwest Missouri; so we'll cut across into Kansas, hit Johnson County an' swing wide of Newton County an' Baxter Springs. This whole outfit is about as popular just now as so many trail-inspectors, along the Injun Nations line."

"Sorry, boss, but I must go back to Newton County. Just have to do it."

"You damn' young fool! Want to git your throat cut? That money protection ain't good any more."

"I've just got to go back, boss."

"Then you've got a fight down there that you're keen to finish—is that it? Or is it some gal you got to see?"

"I'm collectin' an old debt."

"How many of the boys you want to go with you?"

"Not a one. It's my trouble, if there is any trouble. But I have one good friend down there who has a heap of influence. Jedge Byenck. He'll back my game to the limit."

"Yeah, Byenck has a lot of influence," agreed the boss. "He's goin' to Congress. Big man. Well, you're a young idiot, but I reckon I'd do about the same when I was your fool age."

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN IN THE LINEN DUSTER.

IT was late afternoon when Texas broke his last camp and finished a five mile ride to Hick's Run. Supper smokes were lazily rising from the several cabins along the stream.

Ellis Jones was carrying a bucket of water into the house as he swung off his horse and whistled shrilly. The girl turned, her face lighting up wondrously; but almost instantly it became overcast.

"You were glad to see me, an' now you ain't," said Texas as he took the bucket from her.

"I'll be mortal glad to see you anywhere but here," she told him. "I am horribly afraid."

His lips smiled, but his eyes narrowed. "Some one been lookin' for me? Have they found out how they were sold?"

She glanced up and down the creek apprehensively and in a low voice told him, "Armed men have been here. They asked no question. Just looked around. Whilks and Jo Sling were among them. I feel as if they were watching us now. Mam Lize says it's dangerous for you to come back here. I was planning to write and send it to your home ranch by some man at Baxter Springs. Laughin' Diggs was to go down and find a man to carry it."

"I'm keen to read that letter, Ellis... Mam Lize believes in signs; I believe in my gun."

"We mustn't stand out here! Come inside. Supper will be ready in about an hour."

The girl's aunt received Texas rather coolly. After the aunt had withdrawn to the kitchen, Texas asked, "Why doesn't she like me?"

Ellis's face flushed; yet she smiled slightly as she explained, "She thinks I should go to Washington."

"Wants you to marry the jedge?" Texas gravely asked, and she nodded. He morosely continued, "Mebbe she's right. Some difference in marryin' a jedge, who can go to Congress, an' marryin' a waddie."

"All the difference in the world, Washington. So marrying a judge is out of the question. We'll go over and call on Mam Lize."

As they walked toward Mam Lize's cabin a horseman came riding down the creek. He reined in on beholding the couple and grinned sardonically, and swept off his hat and bowed low.

"Howdy do, Whilks," greeted Texas.

"Howdy. Drive finished, I take it. Going back to the ranch?"

"I opine to, after I've neighbored here a trifle."

"No trouble with the drive?"

"Not more'n ordinary."

"Glad to see you back." And with enigmatical smile Whilks bowed to the girl and pricked his mount into a gallop, swerving to enter the Danby road.

"He's up to something, Ellis," remarked Texas as the rider disappeared around a bend.

"He's up to something bad," she

whispered. "I do wish you'd go—and come back when it's safe for you to be here."

His bronzed face hardened. "It's a pretty howdy-do when a native of old Missouri can be run off a crick he was born on, by an out-stater, an' a prime scallywag at that."

SHE placed a slim hand on his arm, and whispered, "If you'll go now —we'll be married and I'll go with you." Her eyes were pleading.

He caught her hand. "You're a yard wide an' all wool, Ellis. But I can't take you down into the brush country, where I'd be just another brush-popper. I own land here. It's my home. I own a lead mine, out in the briery lot...You never can lose trouble by runnin' away from it. I have one friend besides you, Ellis, who will stand by me. Jedge Byenck. He has powerful influence in these parts."

"Yes, he has much influence in Danby; but anything might happen up here. You'll be safer in town. Laughin' Diggs is my friend. He will be yours."

Texas smiled whimsically and murmured, "Crazy."

"He's queer, but he knows more than folks reckon. Oh, here's Mam Lize."

The eccentric woman was standing in her doorway, her white hair streaming down her back. At her side, with arched back, stood a big black cat. She called out to the young people, "Glad to see you two together. A handsome-looking couple. But you're foolish to come back here, Washington. Bad men are talking about you in Danby. You played some trick on them."

"Just what trick do you mean, Mam Lize?"

"You should know better than even an old witch. But come in."

After they had entered Mam Lize demanded, "Now, Washington Calm, you tell me why you're hanging around these parts."

"Ellis an' me will be married. I shall build a house on the old place an' work my lead mine."

Mam Lize nodded and said, "I remember when your father came back with his samples of lead-ore." She dropped a pinch of tea in a cup and moistened it with water and threw the contents into the fireplace. The particles remaining in the cup interested her vastly. Even Texas was impressed by her serious eagerness as she studied the "signs." With a little sigh she put the cup on a shelf and warned:

"Danger. Deadly danger. You can escape it by riding back to Texas. But—"

For half a minute the two waited for her to complete her warning.

"But what?" prompted Texas.

"You'll never marry a girl from Hick's Run if you go away."

"Nonsense, Mam Lize!" protested Ellis.

"The signs show it. If he goes to Texas it'll be a weary long time before he comes back."

"I'm stickin' here," growled Texas. "Never had any other notion." He was very skeptical, although he appreciated the old woman's solicitude and sincerity. He said, "Jedge Byenck won't stand by and see me rubbed out. Those bad hombres know he can make a lot of trouble for them."

"Even he can't fetch you back after you're killed," warned Mam Lize. She studied the tea-cup again, and her gaze grew less somber. "I believe I can help you, Washington. You two leave me now and I'll set to work."

As the young couple walked toward the Jones cabin, Texas suddenly de-

cided, "I must ride to the brier patch where pap made his strike. I'll be back in two hours, about sunset." The girl wished to accompany him, but he insisted, "I must work fast and be back here before Whilks can return with a parcel of friends. I shall want a pick-ax."

"We have one. But if you're not here by sundown I shall come looking for you."

"Don't. I may swing around to the east and return a different way. Stay here."

SECURING the pick-ax, he took the old trail; but this time he halted short of the brier patch, and concealed his mustang in the woods north of it.

Much brush had grown up since he was a small boy here with his father, and he was hard put to it to visualize the place where he had seen the bear. In his man's eyes, the place had shrunk; but he located the corner where his father had found the signs, close to the surface.

He cleared away some of the bushes and brambles, then struck pick to earth. At the depth of a few feet he struck native lead sulphid. He noticed that the bluish-gray luster tarnished after a brief exposure to light and air.

Another ten minutes satisfied him he had struck the lode uncovered by his father. Scattering cut bushes over the spot, he hastened to his mustang and rode east for half a mile. He dismounted to dip up water in the wide brim of his hat. The mustang whinnied, and Texas started to scramble up.

The impact of cold metal on the back of his neck turned him to a statue.

"Stick up your paws," commanded a low voice.

He promptly obeyed, and a hand reached around his waist and secured his gun. He was next told, "Now your teeth are pulled, put your hands behind you. Sling, got him covered?"

"Off comes top of his head if he as much as winks," came the reply.

Texas did as he was commanded, and his hands were instantly caught in a slip noose and tied fast. Then Whilks was before him, taunting.

"You reckoned you was a mighty smart devil-be-damned sort of a cuss, eh? How do you like that?" And he buffeted the tanned face viciously.

Texas breathed deep, and slowly said, "I don't like it. I'll prove the same some day."

Sling raced from the bushes and struck Texas with his fist. Texas kicked him off his feet with one swing of his long leg. Getting to his feet, Sling yelled, "Let me plug him!"

Whilks intervened and ordered, "Keep back, you fool! Can't you remember orders? Help lift him on his pony. Then up the back way to camp."

They lifted Texas astride his mustang, and one led the way while the other rode behind with revolver ready. They crossed a low ridge and turned west. Texas quickly got his bearings. They were taking him to the long cabin, but by a different route from that followed by him and Ellis Jones. Jo Sling, in the lead, rode at a gallop, and that pace was maintained. On arriving at the cabin the prisoner was roughly hustled inside and thrown to the floor, so that his ankles could be tied.

TEXAS looked up at the gloating Whilks, and reminded him, "A thousand to the—"

"That bluff won't work," roared Whilks. "Your boss withdrew the

money when the herd crossed the line. . . . What's bulging your pockets?"

He thrust in a hand and fished out the specimens. His eyes glowed with exultation.

"You've fetched us a lead mine!" he softly cried. "That 'll pay half of what you owe us for stealing our money an' paying it back to get that herd through. Oh, we know all about that business now."

Texas managed a grin with his swollen lips, and jeered, "Clear as a Christian's eye, now you've swallered the bait. You're cunning devils."

"Lead mine pays half that debt. Your life pays t'other half. Where'd you find the stuff?"

"I can't remember a thing while I'm thrown an' hog-tied."

Whilks laughed shrilly, almost like a hysterical woman, as he promised, "Oh, your mem'ry will freshen after we start a blaze an' warm your feet."

Sling came through the doorway, announcing, "Some one comin' lickety-larrup."

Whilks whipped out his two guns and jumped to the door, ordering, "Stand by! It may be strangers!"

Texas heard the sound of several horses outside. Raising his voice, he cried, "Inside here! I'm a prisoner! Look out for guns!"

Whilks chuckled and put on a mask. Sling did likewise. Five men, all masked, filed into the room. Pointing to the prisoner, Whilks proudly reported, "We bagged him, Chief. And he's found lead—his ore samples are on the table."

Unlike the others, the leader wore a long linen duster that came to his heels, and was tightly buttoned from chin to below the waist. Outside of this he wore his belt and two revolvers. His slouch hat was too big for his head and rested on his ears. He stepped briskly to the table, giving no heed to the prisoner. All heard the queer sucking noise he made as he drew a deep breath between his teeth. He whispered something to Whilks, who answered, "He won't tell."

The leader pointed to the fireplace and nodded to Sling, who at once started a blaze. Texas glared up at the leader and called out, "Listen, you tall galoot, you can't burn nothin' out of me."

The leader appeared not to hear this defiance. He whispered again, and Whilks explained, "He was takin' a drink from the crick when we jumped him. Chief, it should be easy to find where he found this ore."

The leader removed a shutter directly over Texas's head and held a specimen to the light. Exposure to the air already had dulled the luster, but there was no mistaking; the lump was rich in lead. The leader inhaled again with a soft hissing sound and gripped the specimen more tightly. Texas exclaimed aloud, as he saw the thread of white, the hair-wide scar on the second joint of the man's thumb. Overwhelmed by rage, he cried, "You damn' murderer! You killed my pap!"

The leader whirled and glared down at his accuser; then he returned to the fireplace and said something to Whilks. The latter announced:

"Chief believes this man should be rubbed out. Any reason why he shouldn't be?"

No one objected. Whilks then asked, "It can be my job, can't it? I caught him."

The leader nodded.

Texas would have expected immediate execution if it had not been for the man busily heating two iron rods.

He burst into discordant laughter and defied, " 'Pache Injuns couldn't make me tell."

THE leader murmured in Whilks's ear, who turned and directed Jo Sling to cross the valley and look for signs near where the capture was effected. Sling galloped furiously away. The leader sat, with his back to the prisoner. No one spoke during the period of waiting. Sling was back almost as soon as a fleet horse could go and return.

The gang's caution was extreme, however. When the thudding hoofs were heard five men with drawn guns stepped to the door. One softly announced, " Sling's using his hat for a basket."

Sling swaggered in, his evil face triumphant as he extended his ragged hat to the leader. The latter examined several specimens critically, and then patted Sling on the shoulder. All the vicious company knew that the prisoner no longer possessed a secret.

Whilks laughed silently, and told Texas, " Hot irons couldn't burn it out of you, eh? Well, we have it."

The Chief stepped to the fireplace and pulled out the iron rods. Whilks eagerly advanced, but was waved back; and the chief tapped a gun. Whilks went for a weapon, but the leader caught his wrist and murmured briefly. Then he passed into the second room and closed the door. Two men brought bacon and eggs and measured coffee into a big pot.

Like one in a trance Texas watched these preparations for a supper to be genially eaten after he was dead. He had always believed in his destiny, or luck; and now his faith was crumbling. The leader was as remorseless as Fate.

" You know what? I'm skeered of that old witch," suddenly complained Sling. " She oughter be rubbed out."

" Fine," said Whilks. " Go ahead and do it."

" Ya-ah! An' have a damn' spell put on me."

Texas spoke up, saying, " She made a powerful medicine and told me just what was to happen. She told me where I would find lead. She saw death for all of you if any harm came to me."

Whilks gave vent to a volley of oaths and kicked the prisoner in the side, and snarled, " Just what would happen to us if you got away to blab?"

" I'll kill you for that kick, Whilks. I'll git you just as I'll git the beast who murdered my pap."

" You're gettin' to be too much of a prophet," mumbled Whilks. He reached behind him and picked up a gun on the table. Sling quickly warned, " Boss still in the back room. . . . All that money stolen—but orders is orders."

The door of the adjoining room opened and the leader appeared. He was carrying seven packages of the bogus money. He thrust one in his duster pocket and gave one to each of the men. Then he held up an open hand to Whilks, and departed.

" Doesn't want to be close when I pull trigger—scared somebody 'll hear it and cut him off!" grumbled Whilks. " Got to wait five minutes."

He fished out his watch and noted the time. " If there's any lovin' messages to a pretty gal, I'll be glad to deliver 'em," he offered sardonically.

Texas gave up all hope, and he turned on his side to face his executioner. His new line of vision included the door to the back room. At least, he was glad that the herd had gone through. His heart ached as he thought

of Ellis Jones, waiting. She might never know what had happened.

Even while his misery was clogging his brain he blinked his eyes. He knew it must be imagination, and yet the door of the back room seemed to be slowly opening. None of his captors noticed what he was seeing. Whilks was leaning against the wall, close by the side of the big chimney. Sling, with two pails, was unbarring the door to go for water. The other four men were watching the prisoner.

TEXAS switched his gaze when he heard Whilks close his watch. The five minutes had ended. Sling, with the door ajar, turned to watch the execution. Then the miraculous happened. The door of the adjoining room was violently flung wide open, and streaks of fire and a hail of lead threw the outlaws into dire confusion.

Sling dived through the doorway. The four men in a row pitched forward or slid to the floor. Texas swept his startled gaze back to the chimney. He was in time to see a section of the wall closing, to catch the glint of Whilks's gun barrel as the man suddenly disappeared through a secret exit.

Through the smoke came Laughin' Diggs, but laughing no more. Behind him were Bill and two other Texans. It was Bill who set Texas free and stuffed a dead man's guns into his hands. Diggs was frantically striving to open the secret door by the chimney. Without pausing to wonder why a crazy man should suddenly develop into a gunman in quest of criminals, Texas came to his benumbed feet. Bill was at his shoulder, yelling, "Grab a hoss! Grab a hoss!"

He threw himself into his own saddle, and with the reins between his teeth and guiding the mustang with his knees, he rounded the end of the building in time to discover two horsemen mounting the ridge ahead. The leader was the man in the linen duster, who must have turned back to see the meaning and outcome of this unexpected gun battle. The other was undoubtedly Whilks, who was quickly closing up the gap.

Texas lifted the mustang to a faster clip, and Bill fell in behind him, a rod or so back. Off at one side there was an interchange of shots, but Texas did not look around till he reached the slope at the other side of the valley over which the two fleeing horsemen had disappeared. When he glanced back, it was in time to see Jo Sling pitch headforemost from his horse. Diggs, blowing smoke from the gun that had ended Jo Sling's mortal career, yelled for them to wait, as he came after them with the two punchers. But there was no holding Texas and Bill, with the last of their vicious quarry just vanished over the crest of the ridge.

When Texas topped the slope, two shadowy figures were plunging into the gloom of the bottom lands. He thundered after them, the mustang running like a rabbit. On gaining the valley he gazed sharply toward the east, toward the briars and the mine. But he saw no signs of the enemy. Bill, distanced, was clamorously profane in demanding that Texas wait for him.

A vain shot from the south revealed the route taken by the enemy. Texas scarcely could believe they would take the regular road to Danby, but they seemed to be doing just that. Then he decided they were banking on their mounts to carry them to town, where they might lose themselves among the

four thousand townspeople. Texas realized that did they gain the town they could turn a mob of desperate men against him. He spoke to the mustang, and the wiry animal seemed to find fresh speed.

As Texas passed Mam Lize's cabin, he caught a fleeting glimpse of her standing in her doorway, a tallow-dip held high above her head, although the twilight was yet sufficient for one to make out moving objects at ordinary pistol range.

Now on a level he bent low and discovered that the two men had separated. He could see but one horseman. He thought he detected motion by the side of the road, and with the adeptness of a Comanche he went over the mustang and fired under his neck at the vague figure. Without pausing to investigate he pressed on. It was two miles to town, and the men ahead seemed to be closer. The light was fading, but the waddie was used to night-riding. He decided the man's horse had gone lame. He was sure of it when the rider left the road and whirled about to meet him.

THE man in the duster opened fire as he sat erect in the saddle. Texas sat upright, the reins between his teeth, and fired rapidly as he galloped to close quarters. The man rose in his stirrups and brought down his gun with much deliberation. One of Texas's shots creased the town horse's head and caused it to rear and plunge.

The masked man's lead went wild; then he drove the spurs home, only now he was coming to meet his pursuer. His purpose was to run down the slighter-built mustang; but Texas's intelligent animal had dodged too many charging steers to be so easily caught. He swerved aside, and as Texas fired he whirled to bring his master up behind the town horse.

Bill was very close, but did not dare to fire for fear of hitting his friend. Texas's predicament was much the same. Then Bill swung low over the side of his horse, and as the masked figure turned to shoot, Texas fairly riddled him with his two guns. Bill spurred forward and seized the crazed mount by the nose. Texas dropped from the saddle and to the side of the still figure.

He tore off the mask and screamed in amazement to find himself gaping down into the face of Judge Byenck. The man was dead. Texas seized the right hand and closed the fingers and thumb tightly. With his free hand he lighted a storm-match. There was the tell-tale thread of white over the second joint of the thumb, even as Hoss Face had seen it. Texas would have collapsed, had Bill not caught him under the arms and lifted him to his feet, all the time begging him to say where he was hurt.

"I'm not hurt," Texas faintly replied.

"You be, you little liar! You tell me."

"Just stunned by what I've found under that mask. It's the jedge! He killed poor pap to git his lead-mine. I come back here an' trusted him, just as pap trusted him. Think what he's always been!"

"Gorrymighty!" gasped Bill. "I'd a heap rather think of him as dead. . . . Hi, hear that Laughin' Diggs let the hoots out of him. The crazy woman, Mam Lize, fetched Diggs into the game.

"Trail boss sent me an' two hombres up here to look after you, and he told us what to do."

Diggs came up at a gallop, cursing roundly. He had already found Whilks dead at the roadside where Texas had shot him; and when he found the man in the duster was also dead he relaxed a bit. Yet he complained:

"What's the use being sent here by the Federal government to round up counterfeiters and then have you folks spoil my game and stop me from being in at the finish?"

"Bill, here come your two Texan friends. Reckon they must 'a' heard the gun-firing," said Texas.

"Prob'ly stopped to pick some purty flowers," growled the disgusted waddie.

"I've had my eyes on Byenck for six months," Diggs went on. "But I never could quite close a case against him. He was the only one in town to deal with crooks and the only man with brains enough to handle them. I've trailed him repeatedly, but he always got wise he was bein' followed. Mam Lize gave me my first tip about that shebang where they had you tied up, Texas. She came across it in some of her wanderings. . . . Hear that! Women-folks beginning to take a hand."

The last was prompted by a shrill voice of a woman. Bill grinned and wiped away some blood that trickled down his freckled face, and added, "She's cheerin' for Texas 'stead of Missouri."

"Callin' my name! Ellis mustn't see this."

And Texas leaped into the saddle and raced to meet and turn back Ellis Jones.

Bill was quite broken-hearted when he learned that Texas's cow-days were ended, and that he was to remain on the Run to take a wife and work his lead mine.

As the years passed Washington Calm's children would look ahead for the coming of the dyed-in-the-wool waddie, who always visited the Calm family and called their daddy "Texas," whenever he was heading home after the long drive north. The railroads crawled farther west, and never again was there the need of driving a herd through Missouri.

THE END.

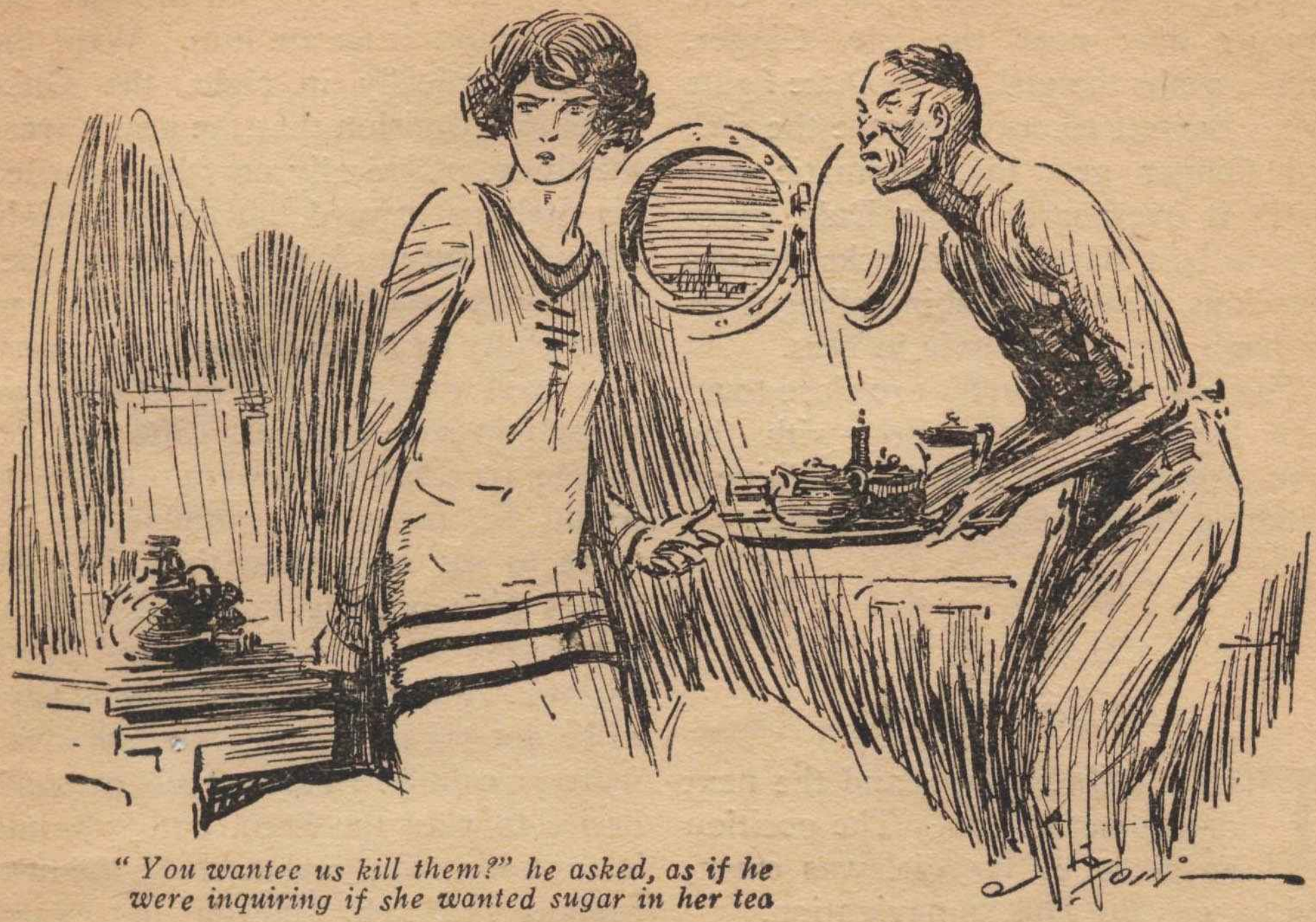
The Perfume Capital

BECAUSE of its chief industry, Grasse, a small medieval city in southern France, is known as the perfume capital of Europe. For from little Grasse and its surrounding gardens come the flowers which supply perfumes for nearly the entire world.

"The perfumed hussy" is the way a bishop of the fifteenth century described Grasse. Its crop each year is said to yield raw materials valued at millions of dollars, and its products are shipped to every civilized country of the world.

Millions of pounds of orange blossoms, roses, jasmine, violets and other floral products are raised annually, and the labor of four thousand persons is required the year round to sow, cultivate, replant, care for and harvest the vast fields of blooming loveliness which make this district one of the garden spots of the earth.

E. F. Giffin.



"You wantee us kill them?" he asked, as if he were inquiring if she wanted sugar in her tea

Looters' Luck

Tense passions threaten an explosion aboard the Duke's piratical schooner as it heads toward a South Seas pearl treasure

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "Glamour of Gold," "Beyond the Law," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

THE "DUKE"—Monty Allerton, an English gentleman gone wrong—and his partner and first mate, "Ginger" Harris, a bully of the Sydney docks, are stranded in Tahiti, with their schooner tied up by debts. But the Duke, hanging about the hotel looking for a tourist sucker, hears a girl identify herself as Thelma Farleigh.

The Duke, knowing she must be coming to visit the hidden pearl lagoon of her father, goes to the wealthy pearl buyer Wing Lee to make a deal. Wing clears the Duke's ship, which is the only decent craft for charter in Papeete, in exchange for a promise of a third of the loot; and he safeguards himself by putting his own Chinese crew aboard the Duke's schooner, the Hihimanu.

The girl charters the Hihimanu, and comes aboard with her fiancé, young Fred Barrett. Barrett overhears enough of a quarrel between the Duke and Ginger to guess their plan—to bar-

This story began in the Argosy for March 8.

ter the girl for Farleigh's pearls. One day as they near the isle, Ginger, drunk, grabs the girl. The Duke fights him. Barrett comes to rescue the girl, and Ginger gets his automatic and tosses it overboard. The Duke manages to best Barrett, and locks the unconscious man in his cabin, telling Miss Farleigh she will be safe in hers.

The Duke and Ginger are close to an open break over the girl—with the cook, Ah Fat, and the other Chinese watching them with bland menace.

CHAPTER V.

FARLEIGH'S PEARLS.

THEY sighted the island the next day toward noon. The position as given by the girl was exact, and so was the Duke's navigation.

It showed first as a dark blue stain against the sky, a low, turtle-shaped hump.

The Duke and Ginger were both on deck, gazing at it with greedy eyes, their differences apparently forgotten, the girl ignored for the time. There lay fortune, ease, idleness and indulgence, as long as the money lasted. For Ginger it might not be long, but the Duke did not mean to scatter his too lavishly. He saw himself back again, not in England, but on the Continent, where a man could live well and comparatively cheaply.

Money bred money. With his luck changed he could enjoy himself as a gentleman, especially if he had a double share. He looked furtively at Ginger whose face was flushed through the tan with liquor and excitement. A plan began to formulate. It was just the sort of scheme that would hatch in the Duke's brain. It had elements of humor in it that appealed to him.

If Ginger tried to hold the girl, the Duke would frustrate him. With the trove practically in sight, the Duke came to a decision that the pearls were the thing. Cynically now he regarded his feelings toward Thelma Farleigh. They had sprung largely from the fact that Ginger wanted her; the Duke had been guilty of being jealous of Ginger!

A man would be a fool to entangle himself in such fashion. She was desirable, true, but there were others who would be far more complacent, far more to his taste than this girl who would give nothing. Any victory of possession would be brief and ignominious. And she would ultimately have to be got rid of. The Duke surveyed matters calmly. He had no personal desire to play the hero, and it would be a false rôle, inasmuch as he was robbing Farleigh. He did not expect or desire gratitude from the girl or from Farleigh. But it would be a delightfully dramatic touch!

He would defend the girl and kill Ginger in her defense. The crew—Wing's crew—would see it, testify to it. It left the Duke with no need for explanations as to why Ginger was missing, or why the Duke had fallen heir to a double share.

Wing would keep to the letter of his word. That was a curious trait about the Chinaman. In the eyes of the world he might be a rascal, clever and unscrupulous; but he would keep face with himself. His word was his bond.

The more the Duke thought about it the better he liked it. There had been many times when he had measured Ginger, had looked forward to matching his skill and strength against Ginger's force. He believed he could win, but there was always the doubt that made it interesting. He wondered whether Ginger had any counter plan.

They had been partners, sharing equally, in profitable and unprofitable ventures; but never with a fortune like this at stake. Ginger would make ducks and drakes of his in short order. And the abduction of the girl would bring more complications. Ginger should not have her, nor any of the money; that was settled.

THE wind was faulty, beginning to die down in flaws of breeze. Ginger cursed at it. A current setting round the distant land seemed to hold them back. The sky was cloudless. The Duke knew what it was in these fickle seas to sight land and stay in sight of it for days.

"Let's start the engine," said Ginger.

"We're saving our gas to get back," said the Duke. "We won't want to waste any time. I expect to make things a little difficult for Farleigh to get clear. Once he does, he'll get busy. We want to be well way from Tahiti by then."

Ginger, though muddled to some extent by gin, saw the wisdom of that. He looked moodily at the crew Wing had provided for them and shifted his curses to that astute Chinaman.

The Duke smiled to himself. Wing was clever, but he could be clever, also. Too clever to try to circumvent Wing, in any obvious way. After all, Wing was going to buy the pearls, for cash. He might sell him only half, Ginger's half, and keep his own for better markets abroad.

"We're in no hurry at this end," the Duke said. "I know you want to get your fingers on the pearls. So do I. But I'm looking ahead. There may be wind at sunset. The barometer stands for change. We're not far from the monsoons this time of year. You should learn to cultivate patience, Ginger."

"To hell with patience!" Ginger's eyes were bloodshot. He wanted to finger the pearls and he wanted the girl. He meant to have her. If the Duke interfered, so much the worse for him. There would be a show-down and he, Ginger, would win. The Duke thought he was superior, with his "looking ahead," but Ginger saw a vision of the Duke, past using his brains. Two shares were better than one. If the girl was the issue of the final quarrel it would serve as well as anything.

With each calculating the other's murder, they watched the stain on the horizon. The quartermaster at the wheel watched them with a sphinxlike face as they came aft. Ah Fat watched them from his galley. Those two Chinese had their orders, not only for things as programmed, but for contingencies.

They were on the starboard tack, barely moving, the Hihimanu heeling lightly. From her cabin port Thelma Farleigh saw her father's island and built her hopes on him. Her lover had done what he could against hopeless odds; she cherished his efforts, but he could not help her. She recalled her father's letters. Of late they had grown more and more affectionate in response to hers.

The grief that had sent him a recluse to the South Seas, had dulled with time and with the growth of his daughter to womanhood. She did not mean to leave him. She had not expected to fall in love aboard the steamer when she had started to come to visit the island home he had pictured so vividly, and then to go on round the world. But she knew her father would approve of her choice. The three of them would be together. She would not let him be lonely again.

She had his letters with her and, in her imprisonment in her cabin, she took them out.

"I am a rich man, my dear," Farleigh wrote. "Fortune, which robbed me of your mother, has tried to recompense me by flinging wealth into my lap. It is wealth that will help to make you happy. I have been too selfish in my grief. You will soon be finding some one you love. Let that not part us, even if this seems selfish also.

"It is lonely here. I have only natives, stanch and stalwart. They have worked for me and they will be rewarded. They would protect me, but I have other plans for that, in case some one envies me my pearls. Of course they know, in Tahiti, that I have found a rich lagoon. Some have tried to discover where it is, but I have taken my precautions. What I have, I hold. That is the motto of my family. Wealth is not everything; it cannot cure heartache; but you can, and I will try to make up to you for my neglect."

What were the precautions he had taken? Could they stand up against these men who held her as hostage? She did not know which man she feared the most. She did not know that the crew had been recruited by Wing, and it would not have comforted her much if she had. Some of them might be friendly to her, but what could they do?

SHE could not communicate with Barrett because of the alleyway between their cabins, but Ah Fat told her that he had been given food. Now Ah Fat had failed her. She had tried to bribe him, and through him, the crew.

"My father is a rich man," she told him. "These two men, your captain and your mate, want to take his pearls from him or hold me. They may try to hold me anyway, Ah Fat. If you will talk to the rest, warn my father, and see he is not robbed, he will give all of you plenty."

"You wantee us kill them?" asked Ah Fat, as if he had been asking her if she wanted sugar in her coffee. For a moment the girl's eyes flashed passionately, dimmed as Ah Fat frowned.

"No can do that," he said. "I lookee out along of you. Do all can do. But no can do what you wantee."

The Chinese were beyond comprehension, she told herself sadly, as Ah Fat smilingly set down the tray he had brought her. He meant well to her, yet he would not help her father. And she feared that his "lookee out" meant only to see that she was well treated up to the time of their arrival.

The wind had died, and they rose and fell on long heaves of the sea. Panic came over her and she sought for a weapon. Nothing better than small scissors, a file. Again Ginger's touch seemed defiling her, she saw again his evil face. The Duke had protected her for the time, but it was because he wanted to show her to her father unhurt. She had wit enough to see that. But—if they got the pearls?

There were six men with her father, against ten on the schooner, aside from herself and Barrett. They would take her father by surprise; they would hold her as hostage. She fought against her terror. Finally, before the portrait of her dead mother and the only one she had of her father, she prayed.

The schooner wallowed on the breathless sea. Fish broke the surface, pursued by enemies. Birds swooped through the air to capture them. Nature was cruel; the strong preyed on the weak.

Barrett, bruised and aching, had not seen the land. His uselessness stung deep. He knew they were close in and he cudgeled his brains for some way to circumvent the pair of scoundrels. If Farleigh could be warned?

Even if he could get ashore, it meant he would have to leave Thelma. But he could not aid her. He was helpless; a failure at taking care of the girl he loved. He would cut a sorry figure before Farleigh, in her eyes. Her father robbed—that did not so much matter; Barrett had means. But he had shown himself a weakling. He regarded himself with infinite, unjust contempt.

He, too, had tried to bribe Ah Fat, though he could only promise money to be obtained in Tahiti. He had not much with him beyond a letter of credit. He had fancied that Ah Fat might be skeptical of any order on a Papeete bank; but he could make nothing of the cook's smile, as he gave his formula:

"Solly. No can do."

His only chance was to get to land and warn Farleigh; but the port was far too small to let Barrett through.

HIS only hope was the door, hinged on the inside. They had his gun, but they had taken nothing else —it stung to see how they disregarded him.

He had a knife in his kitbag that held a combination of several useful tools, among them a screwdriver. But there were difficulties that seemed to be insuperable. He could swim, few white men better, many natives not his equal. But they would have to be fairly well in, for him to get his bearings. He knew little of the South Seas by experience, but he had listened to tales on the ship and in the club at Papeete. Coral reefs were often half a mile wide. The seas rolled and broke over them, foaming above jagged, live coral that cut and poisoned. A man could barely hope to get across alive. There would be entrances; one main one, which he must locate. And there would be sharks. It all seemed pretty hopeless, but he had to do something.

He hid the knife beneath his mattress.

Ah Fat brought his noonday meal, smiling as if there had been no question between them of bribery, something perhaps that Ah Fat's Oriental mind would not resent. After the Chinese left, Barrett took the half-melted canned butter and greased the screws with part of it, saving the rest. The screws might be rusty and they must not squeak.

He could do nothing until nightfall. Then all lay in the laps of the gods. The Hihimanu rocked on the ground-swell, swinging with the current. He saw the island, a long way off, and wondered why they did not start the engine. That was a stroke of luck, whatever the reason. It meant they could not fetch land before nightfall.

Barrett had yachted, handled sheet and wheel. He knew something of navigation, and hoped, rather than figured, that a breeze might come with sunset. He did not think they would go in after dark.

Ah Fat came in with his supper to find him lying in apparent despondency in his bunk. Barrett had wiped the grease from the heads of the screws, hoping it had sunk in through the wood.

He asked about Thelma. Ah Fat beamed.

"Missy all lightee. You not wolly about missy."

He and Thelma had discussed the

cook's friendship. Barrett was skeptical as to the depth of it. Ah Fat was only one of a crew gathered for the purposes of loot. Yet, he might help in a pinch.

The breeze had come. They began to slip in toward the land. Now they were on the port tack. He saw the island looming larger before the swift night came down after the blaze of sunset. Luminous ripples laved the schooner's sides and the wake glowed with seafire.

He worked at the screws. They responded; and with his pulses beginning to hammer, Barrett waited. If they did not go in, they would hold off and on as long as the wind was favoring, so as to be close up at dawn.

There would be some of the crew on deck. He would have to wait until the Duke and Ginger turned in. It was probable the quartermaster would have the wheel which faced the head of the companionway. If Barrett tried that exit he would inevitably be seen.

He had a first-aid kit, supplemented by drugs he had thought would be useful in the islands. Permanganate of potash among them. There was plenty of water in his cabin in the lavatory hold-all. He was dark of eyes and hair.

There was slight risk of any one's coming in. Barrett was ignored, an unconsidered failure. He supposed they had made up their minds what to do with him: set him ashore, if they delivered the girl; if they meant to hold her—and he trusted neither of them—his warning to Farleigh might prevent it. It was the pearls they were after, first and last.

He stripped to the buff, mixed his permanganate and soon he was a deep purple, the color of an indelible pencil. He dyed himself from scalp to waist and from the soles of his feet to his calves.

These warm nights the crew usually padded about the deck clad only in their white pantaloons. He had plenty of those. He dampened a pair and put them under the mattress to eliminate the creases, the too well tailored appearance. It would be only a momentary camouflage he might need, if he needed it at all, a disguise sufficient to pass muster by starlight. Two or three of the crew were tall, as tall as he was.

The sea ran dark now, save for the gleam of phosphor from the swarming *noctilucidae* that gleamed in the crests. The island could only be made out as a mass that shut out a segment of the starry splendor of the sky. Barrett walked up and down his room while the stain dyed, changed to dark brown.

THE Duke and Ginger held the deck after their supper.

"I'm not going to try and go in till morning," said the Duke. "I don't know where the reef-gate is and I wouldn't risk it. The tide's wrong, anyway."

"They'll 'ave sighted us," protested Ginger. "'E knows she's comin'. 'E'll figger any ship 'eadin' up for 'is place is bringin' 'er. Mabbe 'e'll send out a pilot in a small boat."

"Not till the flood starts. If one did come we'd send him back with word we'd come in after sunrise. I'm not going to play this game after dark."

"'Ave it your own way," said Ginger. "It 'll 'old over. You goin' to talk with the girl, tell 'er 'ow to act?"

"That won't take long. She'll stay in her cabin to-night. I'm playing this hand, Ginger, and you'll jolly well stay out of it till we've got the pearls."

The Duke had his gun in its shoulder holster. He was making sure of Ginger. He watched him through the skylight and saw him start drinking, disdaining a glass, swigging from the neck of the squareface bottle. It suited the Duke. Even Ginger's great body could not hold up for ever against so much raw Hollands. His brain was already fuddled. The liquor might foment his lechery, but the Duke was ready to offset that.

The sound of breakers came faintly against the wind. Through his night glasses he could make out a vague line of surf against the dark bulk of the land.

Suddenly a spark of light showed, motionless. That should be Farleigh's house, lit up, not only for night, but as a welcome. The reef-gate should be somewhere not far out of line.

The Duke held on. He did not mean to get too close. There might be mushroom coral, outside reefs, though he doubted it from the steep lift of the land. The island was a volcanic atoll, possibly a long dead crater with its scars vanquished by tropical growth, the pearl lagoon covering the bottom of the pit that had once belched forth fire.

These were only speculations. The Duke was dealing in realities, in sea-gems shimmering with soft iridescence, gems that women coveted and men paid big prices for.

It was a harvest that Farleigh had reaped but which the Duke would market—two-thirds of it his own. Ginger was already fated for the discard.

He made out a gap in the long line of foam, plainest now at ebb tide. Satisfied, he gave the order to come about. They swung out to sea. Ginger was asleep with his head on his hairy arms, down on the table, sodden. The Duke looked down at him with a grin. He could do him in easily enough now, if it was not for the crew. The other way, a fair fight that would be the climax of the Duke's fighting days, was also far the wiser. He held a shrewd notion that Wing might not stand for cold-blooded murder, might use it as a pretext to claim Ginger's share, or part of it. He could not, in honor, if the killing appeared p e r f e c t l y legitimate.

Also, Wing would be very apt to applaud the Duke's defense of the girl. Her abduction would inevitably cause a row sooner or later. Wing would steer clear of any entanglements. He was a partner who might object if the program was not carried out as planned and—the Duke gloomily acknowledged it—Wing had the whip-hand for the time being. They had nothing on him.

Wing did not appear, would not appear in the transaction; but if it went awry, he might take a hand, still hidden, that would spoil their coup. He was a man it paid to play square with, until he had bought the pearls and the Duke was gone.

The Duke meant to sell the schooner, and to take steamer to the mainland as soon as possible, lose himself in the shuffle of America's millions. He would breathe freer then. No one in Papeete would bother about Ginger. He could tell a dozen stories to account for his not coming back. Wing would say nothing, nor the crew.

The Duke's face was sinister as he turned from the skylight. A few more hours and he would be sitting pretty. He gave instructions to the quartermaster. Short hitches off shore and on.

"I'm going to turn in," he said.

He shook Ginger by the shoulder and roused him enough for the mate

to curse him for his interference and fall again into his drunken slumber.

"Stay there, you damned fool!" said the Duke. "I'm going to get some sleep."

IT was gratuitous information to Ginger; but Barrett, close to his door, welcomed it. He too had seen the light, vanished now on the new tack as they went out to sea. All hung on the next tack. They were reaching with the wind just abaft the beam. It would be slightly forward on the return. They would not be close-hauled, the sheets might not be shifted. They would pick up their leeway, undoubtedly steer for the light. Barrett would wait till then. He wrote a note to slide under the girl's door if he got a chance:

> I'm swimming ashore to warn your father. Wish me luck. I love you, always. FRED.

She might not be awake, but she would see it without fail before any one else. She would sleep lightly this night, if she slept at all.

At last they heeled, came about. He saw the light again, steady, ahead on the port bow, well off it. The schooner slogged through the seas. Barrett had to time things closely, but it was hard waiting.

The hinges came off, he slid the door back slightly, saw Ginger sprawled over the table, snoring. The Duke's door was closed.

Barrett saw Ginger's gun, holstered in a belt about the pyjamas the mate wore day and night of late, careless of how he looked or how he might appear to the girl. For Ginger, women were provided for his pleasure, not he for theirs. A frowzy, disgusting object he was.

For a moment Barrett thought of taking the gun, clubbing Ginger, holding up the Duke, running the schooner. He had sense enough to know it was quixotic, impossible. He could not subjugate the crew. He dared not bank on Ah Fat's friendliness—he had already tested it and had encountered its limits.

It was no good to take the gun along. The sea would rust it, if not greased, and he had no time for that. His butter was all gone. He had little time at all if he was to swim ashore, and he would need all his skill and strength to make it. He did not know, as the Duke did, that the tide was still ebbing though it would change before dawn.

That was not so far off. Nearly one o'clock by his watch. He had left it in the cabin where he had closed the door as well as he could. That closed door might pass muster until some one called him, or Ah Fat brought him b r e a k f a s t. Before then, the crisis would be over. Farleigh would be warned, or else Barrett would be tumbling in the surf or would have become a shark's meal.

He thrust that last thought aside. With his stained skin he would have a better chance, he thought, from what they said about sharks. But even if he discarded his pants his middle would show white. No time to change that now.

Farleigh would surely have arms. He could not tote that gun. The loss of it might give him away too soon. Ginger might come out of that stertorous slumber.

He slipped the note under Thelma's door. No light showed. Then he got on the transom cushions beneath the partly open skylight, pulled himself up, wriggled through, and lay close against the coaming. He had not been seen.

The watch was forward, crooning chants.

HE rolled to the rail, crept forward, the mainsail hiding him from the wheel. They were close in. He climbed up by the forward davit that held the port whaleboat, hung to it, overside, and, with a little shiver that was quite explicable, dropped into the sea. He went down deep, to come up in the schooner's wake, praying that no one would look that way.

Almost instantly he heard the quartermaster cry out. They were only tacking, but he had dived, swimming under water. When he came up he saw the Hihimanu had gone about. They held on seaward and he struck out for the reef-gate and the light still burning ashore.

He swam in a strong crawl, his legs churning, and found he was making slight progress. Tide, or current, or both, must be against him. He changed to a slow, strong breast stroke, his eyes fixed on the light. Here and there he saw gleams of breaking phosphor, and he goosefleshed, with the normal man's dread of ranging sharks. Nothing came near him. The gleams were made by night-hunting porpoises or dolphin, he told himself, bucking the water that held him back.

He began to tire, but could not risk turning on his back for rest, lest he lose too much ground. The schooner would be coming back. If they sighted him they would rouse the Duke. He held no illusions of mercy. They would riddle him. His arms were getting heavy.

He changed to a side stroke and found himself forging ahead. The sea no longer bore against him. The tide had weakened. It was the slack between ebb and flood. Heartened, he kept on, scissoring steadily, his legs still strong. He fancied the rollers were helping him. The surf was close. He could hear the furious roar of it and he trod water, waist high.

There was the light, like a beacon. Now he saw the gap in the white water.

"Sharks come in with the flood to the lagoons behind the barrier reef." Some one had told him that. The thought of the grisly sea brutes with their cold, rasping hide and their triangular teeth in bristling rows within enormous maws, persisted. He was opposite the opening when he saw the first sickle fin, cleaving the waves. He had long since kicked off his soggy pants and was swimming stark-naked.

A fin swerved toward him and vanished. He goosefleshed as he thought of the snap of jaws, the drag down. He put all that he had left into a spurt that carried him between spouting fountains of foam, livid here and there with the seafire. He was in the passage. Once his feet struck bottom between two rollers and he thought he was seized.

But the tale he had been told was true. The reef-gate was still too shallow for the liking of the sharks. They might not have seen him; and he was inside, in smooth water, striking out with a trail of greenish light at every movement.

He put down his feet, twice; the second time he felt sand, and waded out, tired but victorious. He had fought a good fight. He made out a wharf, with a schooner moored beside it. The light was still shining as he came out of the water, his knees more than a little weak.

The beach curved in a long crescent. The house with a light was on a low bluff. At the foot of this grew dense *hala* and shore-scrub. There were trail-

ing vines in the sand. He made for the head of the wharf and found a trail. It became a pebbled path between orderly shrubbery. The heavy scent of flowers was in the air.

"What you do along this place?"

A man, naked save for a loin cloth, had stepped out of the shrubs, rifle in hand, its muzzle presented to Barrett's unstained middle. He must have looked like a piebald puzzle to the native. But he had won through. His voice was confident as he answered.

"I want to see Farleigh."

An idiot could see he was unarmed, defenseless, but the man hesitated.

"What for you want to see Farali?"

"Don't be an ass!" Barrett's temper flared. "I've swum off from the schooner to see him. Take me to him."

His decisive voice held mastery. After all, this was a white man, back and belly. A white man's voice, authoritative.

"You go ahead along path," said the native. "I come along, too."

THERE was no doubt of that. Barrett knew the rifle was pointing at his spine, only a few inches from it. In this fashion, nude as the day he was born, he was ushered on to a veranda where another kilted native stopped on sentry-go to confront them.

The door opened with a flood of light that revealed Barrett. A white man in pyjamas and dressing gown stood there, erect though white-haired. Barrett saw his profile for a moment—hawk-nosed, firm of chin, high of brow.

"I'm Barrett," he said, conscious of the fact that his name meant nothing. "I'm your daughter's fiancé. She's aboard that schooner. They're after your pearls. Mean to hold her until they get them. Locked us both up after a fight I had with one of them they call the Duke."

"That will be enough to start with," said Farleigh. "Come inside, Barrett. My girl's fiancé? The Duke? I want to know all about this. And you need some clothes and a drink. You're a bit fantastic as you are. Come in."

It was a big room, the floor covered with matting, the furniture of bamboo, Chinese make, native *tapa* on the walls, trophies of native weapons. Now Barrett saw Farleigh plainly, felt the cool assurance of him. The news had not staggered him. There was even a humorous glint in his eyes.

"I thought she was aboard," the father said. "It was too close to dark to be sure of the schooner. So it was the Hihimanu? Take a slug of Scotch, Barrett. You'll need a shower. My clothes will fit you pretty well. Then we'll talk about the reception of our distinguished visitors. Thelma has accepted you? You've got pluck, to swim ashore; and you must have used brains."

Barrett took the drink. It warmed him.

"There are eight of them in the crew, besides the Duke and Ginger."

"Ah! They'll come in on the flood with the sunrise. I have only four men here. I sent the rest away last month...Don't think I fail to appreciate what you have done. But I am not unprepared for unwelcome visitors. They want to trade Thelma for the pearls. Well, she is worth them."

Barrett hardly knew what to make of him. But he took the shower, stinging cold water from mountain sources piped to the house, dressed and returned. Farleigh was seated, smoking a cheroot.

"Try one," he said. "We can't do much before morning. I was not

sleepy, waiting for my girl. The Duke and Ginger; a precious pair!"

Barrett told him all that had happened. Farleigh smoked through the recital.

"Six of us, all told," he said at last. "And Ginger, if not the Duke, has ideas that are not surprising, from that source. Well, thanks to you, that part of their program will not be put on."

"Not if you'll give me a gun."

"From what I remember of the Duke and Ginger, they are pretty handy with guns themselves. The Duke plays a good game of cards. He'll not throw away a trick."

"They deserve killing, sir! They are just a pair of pirates!" said Barrett hotly.

"No doubt. Take another drink. We'll have something to eat before they come. But, there are better things than killing, even for pirates. I think they will have to be satisfied with the pearls."

"You're not going to let them have them?"

"I might." Farleigh tapped off a long length of ash. "Thelma comes first."

"Of course. But you're not going to let those two unspeakable rascals get away with your pearls. I—I've got plenty of money, Mr. Farleigh, enough for all of us; but—"

"Ten to six," said Farleigh. "The odds are against us. I have what they want. They hold Thelma. Do you know anything about *jujutsu?*"

"Japanese wrestling tricks?"

"More than that. It is the principle of allowing your adversary's strength to become his weakness. Do you want to lie down?"

"No, sir."

Farleigh smiled.

"Then we'll sit up together. I do my own cooking. How about some scrambled eggs, fresh ones, a strip or two of bacon, and some coffee?"

"Aren't you going to make some preparations?"

"I have already made them, Barrett. They are not visible. However, I think they will suffice. But we'll play the game when the cards are on the table—or the pearls. Let's go into the kitchen. You must be hungry after your swim."

Barrett followed his host. He still felt the magnetism of the other's confidence, but he could not understand his methods. True, there had been sentries; but the Duke would hold Thelma aboard. He would land armed.

Barrett, in a daze, watched Farleigh breaking eggs precisely. If Farleigh loved his daughter, as he loved Thelma as his sweetheart, how could he be so calm?

"Ever play bridge, Barrett?"

"Yes."

"Cardinal rule, to lead through strength—and don't overlook your finesses. There, the eggs are done. Toast, and coffee. Warmed over, but the grounds are out. Let's eat."

Still puzzled, worried, Barrett sat down to the meal. He had retrieved himself, in a measure, he felt. But Farleigh was beyond his comprehension.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LUCK HOLDS.

FARLEIGH and Barrett saw the boat putting off from the schooner. The Hihimanu had come in on the flood and anchored well out in the lagoon. There were six men in the boat—four of the crew, and both the Duke and Ginger.

That had been settled automatically. The Duke did not want to leave Ginger aboard with the girl and Ginger did not mean to take any chances of the Duke handling the pearls alone. Barrett's absence had not been discovered. The Chinese quartermaster was one of the boat's crew, all of whom were armed with rifles from the rack. The Duke steered. He was in high fettle. His monocle shone brightly. He meant to put through the thing handsomely.

Farleigh advised Barrett to keep out of sight. "Here is a gun, but don't use it, except in extremity. I am trusting to finesse in the main. If they haven't missed you, your absence from the preliminaries may make matters go more smoothly. They have left Thelma on board, but they are both coming. There may be honor among thieves. There may also be white blackbirds, but I never saw one."

The whaleboat made for the wharf. Farleigh strolled down to meet it. None of his men was in sight. Barrett, like a hound on leash when the hunt starts, remained in Farleigh's bedroom, off the main living room.

One Chinese stayed with the boat. The others, including the quartermaster, came up with Farleigh to the porch. The Duke told the three to stay outside, but they followed in, quietly.

"I think mo' betteh," said the quartermaster as the Duke whirled on them. He showed a square of paper in his hand, with the seal of Wing Lee upon it. The Duke scowled. There was a faint suggestion of the snail track on his spine. The Chinese meant to see the pearls delivered; but he would fool them as to the number. He wasn't going to stand much more of this, he told himself, but he realized that Wing was very much in the game.

For a moment he seemed to see the wise, unblinking eyes behind the big lenses, the hooked nose and thin, down-curving lips.

"*There are Chinese everywhere,*" he seemed to hear Wing's warning.

Ginger, with bloodshot eyes and splitting head that his last drinks that morning had not allayed, stood with legs wide apart, looking round the room.

"I had hoped you were bringing me my daughter," said Farleigh pleasantly. "I think I have seen you both before, or heard of you. To what am I indebted for this visit?"

"That is easily said," replied the Duke. "Perhaps we came too early. I do not see any of your men about."

"The lagoon is cleared," said Farleigh. "I had the best of the shell put on board my schooner on the trip that took my divers back. I have enough for a crew, for present purposes. Four of them."

He was giving the show away, Barrett thought in his seclusion. Was he tamely going to give up the pearls because of his fear for his daughter's welfare? If so, the swim had been for nothing.

"Your daughter is very charming," said the Duke; and for a moment Farleigh's gray eyes flashed. "You must long to see her."

"I do." Farleigh offered no chairs. The three of the crew ranged themselves by the door, missing nothing, silent but watchful.

"As a matter of fact," said the Duke easily, "she came with us. She will come ashore presently—I hope—after we have talked business." He kept his eyes on Ginger, growling in his beard.

"What do you mean?"

"A beautiful girl is a pearl beyond price. Worth many pearls. You have

them. We have your daughter. I did not bring all my crew ashore. They are extremely efficient, in many ways. There you jolly well have it in a nutshell, Farleigh. An even trade."

Farleigh groaned and seemed to sag into the chair beside him.

"Do you realize that these pearls represent my fortune, that I have been gathering them for ten years? They belong to my daughter. Are you human? Men, you can't mean to do this!"

"To skim the cream? Precisely," said the Duke.

"Why—what assurance have I that my daughter is even aboard? Or that you will bring her ashore safely?"

THE Duke handed over a note which Farleigh fumbled as he read.

"This is her writing. She says she is unharmed. Send for her."

Ginger broke in. He felt that he had made a mistake in coming, that the Duke had outwitted him. He had been a damned fool to drink so much last night, he told himself.

"Show us the pearls. All of 'em. They may not be enough."

"They are all I have," said Farleigh. "I call no names, but this is piracy."

The Duke smiled and polished his eyeglass on a silk handkerchief. He held his hand close to where the gun nestled, a hook of his immaculate tunic open. First the pearls. Then, if Ginger got nasty—

"Call it what you jolly well like," he said. "Let's see the pearls, Farleigh."

Once the pearls were in their possession—and the Duke did not see what was to prevent that—Ginger would make his move. The Duke knew his partner. He could see signs of his breaking loose. It was a funny situation. The Duke would appear to be playing fair, aside from the piratical deal itself. An interesting rôle. And good-by, Ginger!

Farleigh rose and went to a cabinet of hardwood. He opened its doors and disclosed steel ones. There was a safe back of the wooden lining.

"There are enough here for all," he said. "If you will take half—even two-thirds?"

"Chuck it," blurted Ginger. "It's the whole 'og or nothin'."

He looked like a hog himself, with his piggish eyes, his snout of a nose and his mouth working greedily. Barrett had his door slightly open. He stood beyond the angle of its casing, his gun trained on the mate.

Farleigh spun the combination, opened inner doors again, took out shallow drawers that were lined with velvet, their contents hidden by sheets of jeweler's cotton. He set them on the table. Ginger and the Duke stepped forward eagerly. The three Chinese stayed where they were, vigilant.

Ginger grunted and the Duke caught his breath as the first sheet of soft wadding was lifted. The drawer was filled with pearls. They ranged in size, but they were selected, perfect. The biggest was close to eight grains and it had its twin.

The color varied. Most were silvers, some roseate, two pear-shaped ones steely black. The sunlight caught their radiance, heightened it. A fortune in one drawer.

There were six drawers in all. The Duke did not offer to displace the pearls.

"Seems a shame to disturb them," he said. "Suppose you have these wrapped up."

"What's in the sack?" asked Ginger, looking at the lower compartment of the safe.

"Baroques. You don't want them. They have little value."

"We take the blarsted lot," said the mate roughly. "Trot 'em out."

Farleigh set the bag on the table. He straightened up. His shoulders were squared, his voice icy.

"You have emptied the safe," he said. "Now send for Thelma and take the pearls."

"We'll take the pearls all right," said Ginger with an ugly grin. "An' we may—"

Barrett's finger began to squeeze the trigger. The Duke's hand slid inside his tunic. Ginger's big paw was on the butt of his gun. Farleigh seemed the least concerned, but he was alert.

It was the quartermaster who spoke and broke the tension.

"I think she come along now," the Chinese said.

Ginger swung to the window with an oath. The Duke lost his poise. A boat was coming from the schooner, with the rest of the crew rowing. The girl sat in the stern.

"Damn you," snarled Ginger, "you double crossed me!" His gun swung out and up, but the Duke's weapon covered him.

"You're making a blithering ass of yourself," he said coldly. And again the quartermaster spoke, mouthpiece of Wing Lee.

"No double cross, I think," he said. "Maybe Ah Fat speak along of you, li'l' while."

"I'll cut his heart out!" Ginger mouthed like a maddened dog. Suddenly, his face scarlet, he cried: "Barrett ain't with 'em. 'E loves your girl, Farleigh, an' she loves 'im. This ain't played out—"

"You're half crazy with gin and your own heat," snapped the Duke. "The girl stays here. There may be some disagreement about your daughter, Farleigh, but you'll find no dissension among us when it comes to the pearls. We're all out for them. Drop that gun, Ginger, or I'll drop you."

THERE was that in his tone that got through to Ginger's senses—an exultation and an eagerness. He knew that the Duke would do what he said. Ginger was not too muddled to guess at the reason. His share of the pearls—and a good excuse. He still held his weapon, though the muzzle was lowered. The quartermaster took a step forward. The back of one hand chopped at the side of Ginger's wrist. The fingers of the other snatched away the gun.

"Mo' betteh, I think," said the Chinese.

"You're mistaken about Barrett," said Farleigh. "He's not aboard. I admit I deceived you slightly. I was not unprepared for your arrival or your news. Come in, Barrett."

The Duke dropped his monocle as he stared at Barrett's darkened face. Ginger's jaw sagged.

"I'll be damned!" said the Duke softly. "I underestimated you, my lad. Though you put up a good fight, at that. How about the pearls, Farleigh? There are ten of us."

"Nine, since you disarmed your friend, Ginger. But you'd give him his gun again, I suppose, the first chance. . . . I don't want bloodshed. I appreciate your odds. All I want is my girl."

The boat had landed. The cook, Ah Fat, and the others formed a sort of escort about her. The man left at the first boat left it and joined them. The Duke cursed softly. He had lost his coup with Ginger, for the time. Lost that trick anyway. It was the attitude

of the crew that bothered him. They would unite with him and Ginger for the pearls, but Wing had spoken about the girl. And they were all armed, with his own weapons. Still, the quartermaster would testify that the Duke had been on the side of the girl. It might help, later.

She came in through the door. Barrett came swiftly to her, put one arm about her. He still held his gun. He could not believe that Farleigh would give up the pearls. He must have stationed his four men somewhere. Of course the odds were against them. But he held Thelma until she ran into her father's arms.

"Quite safe, my dear?" Farleigh asked quickly.

"Quite."

"Then, you men take your loot and get back to your schooner. I've got my daughter. You can take the pearls."

"Try and stop us," jeered Ginger. He tore a *tapa* cloth from the wall and wrapped up the drawers. The quartermaster picked up the sack of baroques. They filed out, down to their boats, Ginger leading. He was still fuming, but those precious drawers soothed him a little. Once he turned on Ah Fat.

"I'll settle with you when we get aboard, you yeller sneak," he said.

"I follow instluction," said Ah Fat, quite placidly. "Wing Lee say no makee bobbely about gal. Too much tlouble bimeby, vely like."

"He's dead right," said the Duke. "I saw that long ago."

"You're a bloomin' liar!" retorted Ginger. "You wanted her."

"We'll take that up later, when you're sober—if you ever are," replied the Duke serenely. "I'm right about the girl; you'll see that. We've got the pearls. There's one more job; two. I'll tackle one. You can do the other."

"What do you mean?"

"We're not quite in the clear. We're faster than that schooner of Farleigh's. But I'm going to take the rudder off the pintles and smash it, while you fix his engine. I see there's a propeller."

In spite of his mood Ginger grinned. The Duke overlooked little.

"I'll fix it proper," he said.

It did not take them long. Farleigh watched from the porch. The girl and Barrett had gone inside. Ginger tossed some metal objects into the deep water of the lagoon, far apart, beyond diving for. Then the two boats rowed for the schooner. It was still flooding and they did not hoist anchor.

FARLEIGH went inside.

"They've cleaned you out," said Barrett.

"You never can tell when a finesse goes over," said Farleigh. "Nor how a game will end. I said I did not approve of shedding blood, but if Thelma had not come ashore, or if they had refused to send for her, I would have picked off every one of them before they were fifty yards from shore, or could get to land again. I have a sporting rifle and I have practiced a good deal. . . . My men had four of them covered all the time," he added. He showed round holes bored in the wall amid the trophies of weapons, unnoticeable until pointed out.

"As for the pearls, they were cast before swine, my boy. I trust the swine appreciate their value properly; but I doubt it. I see your things came ashore, Thelma. Not yours, Barrett."

"They don't amount to much, sir. The sooner they leave, the better. I'm thankful I've got money of my own. The one thing, after all, is Thelma. But I hate to see them get away with

it. And they've broken up your schooner."

"It won't take long to make another rudder and ship it. I've got extra parts for the engine; I doubt if they've smashed it. You know, I rather expected something of this sort, though I didn't figure on the Duke and his lout of a partner. There's bad blood between them. I shouldn't wonder but that they fell out over those pearls. Now, Thelma, tell me all about it."

At noon the lagoon was empty. The Hihimanu was under power and sail. Soon she was hull down, making northeast. Then she was gone.

"I've got a few things to show you," said Farleigh. "But first we'll see what damage they did to the schooner."

ON board the Hihimanu, Ginger began to listen to reason as the Duke expounded the wisdom of Wing Lee.

"The disappearance of a girl would kick up a row that wouldn't end easily," he pointed out. "Too much 'bobbely,' as Ah Fat said."

"I'd like to slit his throat."

"The rest might have something to say about it. You'll notice they haven't turned in their rifles. I'm not going to ask them, either. We'll trail with the hounds for a bit. But Wing was right about the girl. You'd have tired of her and then what? Better to sell pearls to make a string for a woman's neck than put a rope around your own. You can get plenty of women. Show them a pearl, or the price of one, and they'll come running. Let's have a drink."

The pantry boy brought a bottle and glasses. The Duke held up his tot.

"Here's to our luck," he said. "It's changed, Ginger."

"You'd 'ave shot me back there," said Ginger. "I ain't forgot that."

"You drew on me, Ginger. You said I'd double crossed you."

Half mollified, the big mate clinked glasses. But he was fairly sober. He mulled over the situation and seemed reconciled.

Fifteen minutes later they were gloating over the gems.

"'Ow much do you think is there?" asked Ginger.

"It's hard to tell. A quarter of a million, anyway."

"A quarter of a million! You want to take your 'alf?"

"There's no sense in that. Wing will want to handle the split."

"Blarst 'is yeller 'ide! Wot about 'oldin' out a few?"

"I've thought of that," said the Duke. "They saw the drawers were fairly full, though."

"The crew, the three of 'em who crowded in? They didn't count 'em. Let's take a few from each drawer. We'll 'old them ourselves. An' we'll put the big lot in the safe. We've each got a key to the inside lock. There's a third one at Steve Benoit's joint. We'll put the drawers in the ship's safe an' chuck both our keys overboard."

The Duke considered the proposition.

"Not trusting me, what?"

"I wouldn't trust myself with that lot."

"You're a foxy lad, Ginger. But we'll do that. Get out of here, and stay out," he said to the hovering pantry boy. He pulled the curtains over the skylight after he closed it. Soon a small, gleaming heap was in front of each of them.

They put these in small sacks of chamois, with long strings, slung them about their necks. The rest they put in the safe. The Duke tied both their keys together after the doors were

closed. Then he summoned Ah Fat, gave him the keys.

"Throw these overboard, right away," he said. Ah Fat showed no surprise, but vanished with a "can do."

The Duke changed the combination, Ginger watching him. Then they shook hands, not in friendship but with a measure of mutual respect that was rare between them. More, perhaps, on the Duke's side than on Ginger's. He had to accept the situation. He could devise other means of getting most of Ginger's share later on; then he would get rid of him. He knew Ginger would be on his guard, for the time, until he began to handle his money.

For his part, Ginger had not forgotten the eager gleam in the Duke's eyes when he held the gun.

THEY slept well and easily that night. The gems they had held out from Wing Lee might approximate fifty thousand dollars, but there was at least four times that sum in the safe, only to be got at with the third key that was held by Steve Benoit in case of emergency. This was a gage of safety between them. Even then each slept with gun handy.

Ginger had seen the Duke's naked, murderous soul shine in his eyes. The Duke knew it. For the time the locked-up gems protected them from each other. They might smile and jest and drink with each other until Wing paid the money but, even now, their partnership was dissolved.

But when Ginger, in the morning light, drew out his bag to look once more at the gems that Wing Lee was not to know of, he found a square of heavy rice-paper in the sack. On it was the seal of Wing. At the same moment the Duke, with a frown, was regarding a similar totem.

The pearls could not be replaced in the drawers. Wing would know they had tried to cheat. He might have expected them to. His word was his bond. He would probably not consider theirs in that light, he might be tolerant—but this had been a misplay. It meant complications.

The Duke set his wits to work to offset the slip. By the time he went on deck he fancied he had reached a solution. It was not too sound, but it might pass muster.

They made good time. The trade wind sped them on before it. If it lessened, the engine drove them along. Ginger seemed to forget the girl. He still drank and the Duke encouraged him. On the surface they were comrades. They had the loot. Their luck had changed and it still held. On the fourth day they had sighted a mass of something floating on the waves. It was not the dead carcass of a fish, for no birds were near it; nor was it an overturned boat. They headed for it.

"When the luck's in!" cried the Duke exultantly. "Ambergris, Ginger, and Wing's not in on this!"

They hauled the waxy mass aboard, mottled like marble in yellow and black, greasy, with the beaks of giant squid embedded in it. It weighed close to two hundred pounds. It was not much, valuable as it was as a base for perfumes, compared to the pearls, but it was unexpected trove.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WORD OF WING LEE.

THE Duke and Ginger stood once more in Wing's big room. This time there were four attendants. The drawers of pearls were on the teakwood table, so was the bag of baroques,

irregular pearls, lumpish, variant in color, useful only as sets in pins or brooches.

"This is all?" asked Wing.

"Not quite," said the Duke, as Ginger, slower-witted, stared. "We separated some of the best and kept them in leather bags next to our skins to be sure of their luster. Naturally, we could not do it with all of them."

It was the process often used to restore dull pearls, or to maintain the gentle fire of others. Ginger, remembering the sealed square of paper, gave a little grunt. The Duke was clever.

Wing lifted the sheets of wadding from each drawer. He used a pair of pliable forceps, their ends padded, picked up two or three gems from each drawer, scrutinizing them through his glasses; returned them. He poured the baroques into the pan of a pair of scales and weighed them. Then he sat back, clapped his hands and sat with the tips of his nail cases touching, impassive.

The secretary came in, left and returned with a tray stacked with double-eagles. Gold was Wing's touchstone.

Ginger licked his lips. The Duke's eyes gleamed.

"The baroques are worth two hundred dollars," said Wing Lee and piled up ten of the coins. "As for the ambergris—"

"That's got nothing to do with our bargain," said the Duke. "You can leave that out of the reckoning."

"I think not. I may suffer a slight loss, but the ambergris will about recompense me for what I advanced you."

His voice was cold as dripping water from a glacier. While they gazed, puzzled, he put out another stack of ten twenties beside the first. Then a single coin beside them.

"You may have heard the story of a farmer who left twenty sheep between three sons," he said. "They did not want to kill a sheep. They bought one from a neighbor and divided the cost between them, each then taking seven sheep. I am more generous. I donate the odd coin. So."

He split the coins into three parts, seven in each, replaced one stack in the tray and motioned to his secretary who carried it out.

"My word is my bond," said Wing complacently. "Take your money."

They both spoke together, angrily. Wing regarded them with his wise eyes set between the hooded lids.

"I credited Farleigh with wisdom," he said. "He also possesses imagination. I thought he would have been ready at any time for a raid on his island. There are always leaks. But the two of you are fools, blinded by greed. No doubt he cozened you nicely with the proper talk and play. If you are not satisfied, you may give me back the gold and take the drawers and their contents, and the baroques. I pay only their value because I said I would do so. Strictly within the wording of that bond, I am absolved from even doing this."

The Duke's monocle dropped. He had a glimmering of the truth. Ginger's slow brain responded only to wrath.

"Tryin' to chisel us, are you? You yeller snake, you don't get away with it!"

"IF you try to draw that gun you are a dead man," said Wing. "I see your partner has more restraint."

The four attendants had closed in, their hands were withdrawn from their sleeves, holding automatics. Others appeared as if by magic through the paneled walls.

"Blind fools, who have poached real pearls a score of times! Farleigh knew the psychology of your type. Your eyes were sealed. It did not occur to you that Farleigh had prepared these drawers and set them in the safe, bait that you swallowed. They are imitations. Good ones, glass containers skillfully lined with the iridescent scales of small fish. In your country, Allerton, they call them 'bleak.' I mean no play on the word. They are of little value to me. Still, I might use them, and the baroques, for what I have paid you."

The secretary glided in, placed a paper with two rows of ideographs upon it before Wing. They glimpsed the radio operator at his set. Wing read the paper impassively.

"Take the imitations or the money," he said. "It is immaterial to me. The audience is at an end. I have received important news."

He spoke like a high mandarin dismissing pleaders.

"You mean to say these are all fakes?" asked the Duke.

"No doubt of it," said Wing wearily. He took up a slightly curving blade with a carved ivory handle. It might have been a dagger or paper-cutter. With it, taking one of the larger pearls, he bore down and the imitation gem broke, flattened to powdered glass lined with the tiny scales of "bleak."

"Those you still have, in the bags about your necks you may hold," he said, "as mementos. Go."

They looked at each other, filled with rage and hate. They hesitated, reached for the little stacks of gold. The door was opened for them and they went out into the bright morning. Before they reached the gate they were quarreling.

Inside, Wing's room cleared and he was left alone with the imitations Farleigh had bought for fools to steal, and the bag of baroques. The mass of ambergris had already been brought to him.

He sat there reading the message his secretary had brought. No radiograms came to Tahiti that Wing did not intercept.

"There is some merit in the proverbs of these foreign devils," he said aloud in his own tongue. "There is one: 'When rogues fall out, the devil laughs.' It takes a wise man and one of even mind and temper to be successful in affairs of any kind."

They were reading the same message in the headquarters of the French Colonial authorities.

"Arrest Allerton and Harris, known as the Duke and Ginger, for attempted robbery and abduction. Thought to be bound for Papeete. Also crew of schooner Hihimanu."

A squad of *gendarmes* issued out to once more take possession of the schooner, and this time, of its masters.

THE Duke and Ginger found their vessel deserted. Ah Fat and the others were already on their way through the bush to a distant landing where, by orders of Wing Lee they would be picked up at nightfall, taken to another scene of his numerous activities.

Ginger snatched the bag of mock pearls from his neck, breaking the string. He flung them overboard with lurid curses. The Duke did not follow his example. Such imitations might be palmed off, some time. There were always suckers.

Ginger went below, found a bottle of squareface, his face lurid. He did not look at the Duke until the latter spoke.

"We'd better sell the schooner," said the latter. "I have a distinct hunch that it is better for us to be moving on." He could not guess what had happened, Farleigh's schooner falling in with an American oil tanker, the dispatching of the radio message, not only to Papeete, but to all ports within the compass of the tanker's sending power, and to be relayed from those to still others.

"Why didn't you offer it to Wing?" jeered Ginger, taking another gulp of liquor. "A fine mess you made of this lay. You and your blarsted brains! A lousy hundred and forty dollars apiece. Twenty-eight quid! A fine partner you are! Do you want to know what I think of you, you blighter?"

"I could match it, Ginger, and express it better."

"Yah! You fake toff! You imitation dude."

He took the bottle up again. He saw a gleam in the Duke's eyes, a slight motion of his hand. He flung the half-full bottle and it fell from the Duke's ready guard to the table, smashing at the neck, filling the cabin with its reek,

The next moment they were at each other. Chagrin and mutual hatred broke loose. The rogues had fallen out. The devil laughed as they closed in. The Duke's gun was under the spotless tunic he had donned to visit Wing. Ginger's was in his belt holster but, before he could draw it, the Duke smashed him on the jaw.

Hard bone beneath the pad of beard saved Ginger from a knock-out, but his sight dimmed as he clutched at the Duke and ripped apart his tunic. The Duke had snatched the mate's weapon as he dazed him, flung it away. It fell softly on the transom cushions. Ginger held him in the hug of a bear while the Duke strove to get at his own gun. He was no match for Ginger at close quarters in that brief, short rally.

Ginger's tug broke the holster strap, tore all away. He hurled the gun and it went out through the skylight to the deck, showering broken glass. The Duke struck twice, hard drives to Ginger's belly. He did not see where the mate's gun had fallen, he had no time to look.

Panting, but with breath enough to bellow, Ginger rushed him with flailing fists.

"Man to man, damn your soul! I'll show you who's best."

It was close quarters, to the Duke's disadvantage. He began to cut the mate's face to ribbons with his left, but again and again Ginger closed. Once he had the Duke back to the table, bending him until his spine almost cracked. The Duke got an arm free. Abruptly he sloughed off his ideals of fair fighting; it was suicide here. He slogged at Ginger's bloody face, thumb out from his clenched fingers, gouging the mate's eye, thrusting it on his cheek. He broke away and sought to find the gun. A cushion hid it. And Ginger was on him again.

THE Duke's better condition would tell, if he could keep that human gorilla off. Their clothes were torn apart, sleeves ripped, rags trailing from their waists. Blood smeared both of them. Ginger's blows were like the fall of sledge hammers. The Duke was hurt; a rib broken, if not two. Once Ginger chopped him over his collar-bone, and the Duke's arm hung numb. His left, pistoned to Ginger's heart, saved him. The mate fell back, gasping. Again the Duke sought vainly for the gun in the respite.

Ginger, his eye forced back into the socket, but half blind, howled, raven-

ing. In the next clinch his teeth sank into the Duke's shoulder, tearing away flesh. The Duke kneed him. Ginger doubled up in mortal anguish and the Duke, wavering on his feet, put all he had left into a tremendous uppercut. The mate swayed, toppled forward.

The Duke steadied himself by the edge of the table. He was almost done. But he had won. Ginger groaned, stirred slightly. Even the last fearful punishment had not annihilated him.

Then the Duke saw the butt of the pistol. It would not be murder; his own battered, bloody body testified to that.

He did not hear feet overhead or see the faces peering through the shattered skylight.

"La boxe!" whispered one *gendarme. "Régardez! C'est fini."*

But it was not yet finished. The officers stared, reflecting that the arrest would be easy, looking at the fallen one, the other barely upright, the confusion of the cabin, the ruin of the table-setting that the pantry-boy, with an unconsciously sardonic touch, had placed before leaving.

Ginger's arm shot out, grasped the Duke by the ankle, jerked him from his uncertain footing. The Duke fell sprawling, just missing the table; one arm on the transom cushions, reaching for the gun, found it.

It roared as the *gendarmes* rushed to the companionway; roared again. Ginger lifted himself on feet and head, bent like a bow. He collapsed, rolled over. His groping hand found the sharp knife that Thelma Farleigh had sought to use after her first futile stab. The Duke was on one knee. His strength was gone, but—

He saw the gleam of steel, Ginger's spasmodic, convulsive thrust. He fired again and the bullet went through the top of the mate's skull. Some element of life or twist of muscle hurled Ginger's dead bulk forward. The knife, driven by his weight, entered the Duke where his belt was torn open. It ripped down, deep.

The game was ended.

THE END.

Singing Bottles

WHEN glass-blowing in New England was an art as well as an industry, many beautiful bottles of sapphire, emerald, topaz, ruby and clouded iridescent glass were made. Some of pale-green with undertones of blue, square-shaped with long, slender necks, were so constructed as to emit musical sounds when placed in an open window against the wind. The sounds varied from diminuendo to crescendo according to the gale, and took the place of the once popular Æolian harp.

One of these "singing bottles" left in a loft with the open neck lying to a knot-hole in the clapboard caused an old farmhouse near the Franconia Notch in the White Mountains to remain untenanted for many years. At last a strong-minded family from Boston moved in, and hearing the weird wails, traced them to their source in the attic and found the bottle. It was exhibited as the "ghost" which had so long haunted the house, and was bought by a collector for a sum far in excess of any price ever paid for an ordinary, unhistorical glass bottle.

Minna Irving.

Beans for Backbone

A dozen men against six thousand—yet it was up to Inspector Allen and the Mounted to manage Sitting Bull and his untamed braves

By RICHARD A. MARTINSEN

INSPECTOR BEVERLY ALLEN sat outside his orderly room at a plank table littered with office-forms and correspondence. Mosquitoes fairly swarmed in the air, for it was June. Now and again the inspector's hand raised mechanically and slapped off one of the pests. Otherwise he did not notice them, in his abstraction.

A vista of frowning wilderness showed through the open gateway of the detachment stockade. There were twenty thousand square miles of it. In that vast area this trim, dapper little man at the table was a benevolent emperor; at least headquarters, having big-heartedly detailed twenty men for the purpose, expected him to be. But the inspector was not thinking of that just now.

A letter lay open on the table before him; written in a tumbled, hasty, passionate woman's hand:

> . . . Oh, Bev, Bev! I didn't think I could endure it, with you buried in that horrid, awful wilderness! She's a darling, Bev—a golden dream child—but we both need you so! Each night I pray the furlough you applied for will be granted.

For a long moment Allen's clear black eyes clouded; clouded with the vision of a gallant woman, clutching their little first-born pleadingly to her breast—the child he had not seen.

A twinge of bitterness passed through him. He couldn't accept the furlough even if it was granted, now—with that mist of hushed suspense, that ominous portent hanging spectrally over the breadth of empire intrusted to his care.

There was tragedy brewing. The Indian nations felt it, the 'breed outlaws, the even more sinister whisky-runners and fur-thieves. So too, and long since, had the keen-witted man at the table. Yes, grim and grievous was the weight which rested on his trim shoulders.

With a sigh the inspector pushed aside the letter from home, and at last turned to an official communication, which swiftly caused his cool eyes to glint and sparkle, his square jaw to thrust out with repressed anger.

The tall, broad frame of Sergeant-Major Pierce blotted out the threshold of the orderly room. Inspector Allen looked up.

"I trust, sergeant, that the appetite of the detachment for beans is insatiable?"

The sergeant grimaced, then grinned. "If 'tisn't, sir, it ought to be. We've had an almighty lot of practice."

"Ah, yes. Well, it appears the practice will continue indefinitely." Inspector Allen tapped the paper in his hand. "Supplies for the Mounted are as usual lost, strayed, or stolen, so Commissioner Macleod informs me. And all the Queen's horses, and all the Queen's men—at Ottawa—can not locate them again. Straight pork and beans this summer, sergeant, and probably next winter, too, augmented by fresh meat in season; only in season, sergeant, you understand."

Pierce nodded. The police had to serve as exemplary models for their children.

"Under the circumstances," he ventured, "I suppose it would be foolish to inquire about our pay?"

"Not merely foolish; infernally untactful," agreed his officer. "Pay? Pay? Where have I heard that word, officially? And there's something else, a damned sight more serious. Our clothing was included in the missing supplies."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Pierce in dismay. He looked down at the trousers tucked into his riding boots. They were a crazy-quilt of patches, and for all that in places still gaped raggedly.

"The cruelest blow of all," murmured the inspector quizzically. "We can keep plugging on an undiluted diet of beans. We might even get along without our Sniders—for against the Winchesters our outlaw friends are importing from the States, they're more ornamental than useful anyway. But when will the great political brain appreciate the difficulty of controlling the whole Northwest in a state of—ah—seminakedness?"

AN incident illustrating the importance of uniformed authority was at that moment taking place in a wolf den scarce two hundred miles from where Inspector Allen sat. This wolf den was a temporary encampment of the head magician of the Uncapapa Sioux, Sitting Bull. The prime factor of the incident was a thin line of red-coated men.

After annihilating Custer the terror of the Dakotas had decided he was bucking impossible odds.

"We can go nowhere without seeing the head of an American," he declared in council. "Our land has become small. It is like an island. We have two ways to go—to the land of the Great Mother or to the land of the Spaniards. Since spring we have killed one thousand Americans. We have done counting. Let us strike north."

And so the Sioux began to pour across the border, until six thousand of them were camped on Canadian soil, depending on Canadian buffalo or

bounty for existence. Six thousand warriors who had never been conquered, who had crushed or evaded the snares set by almost twice their number of American troops, flung themselves into a wilderness where white authority was represented by a paltry handful of red-coated men.

Eight thousand other savages—Blackfeet, Assiniboine, Sarcee, Piegan, Bloods—already inhabited that wilderness. There were also hundreds of half-breeds—Metis; and outlaws of a score of different types and nationalities. Against this tremendous force, this potentially hostile might, there were available perhaps a hundred or so Mounted Police, and these scattered over thirty thousand square miles!

But the police wore uniforms whose brightness awed the savage breast, and had been taught to look jauntily fearless, no matter what they felt. Thus the knowledge that Sitting Bull had never tolerated the presence of a white man near his person did not deter Assistant Commissioner Irvine in the least. On the morning Inspector Allen was bewailing the dearth of clothing, Irvine trotted casually into the teeming wolf den with an army of ten subconstables.

Perhaps sheer Mounted effrontery swung the scales. At any rate Irvine pushed through a towering retinue of fierce warriors to face a proud-featured, sturdy Indian of middle age. Long black hair fell over his cheeks and in front of his shoulders. His eyes gleamed. His face was devoid of paint, with high cheek bones, prominent nose, heavy jaw, and broad forehead. The mouth was implacable.

"I seek the famous warrior, Sitting Bull," Irvine announced through his interpreter.

"Then your search is over," was the reply, and, surprisingly, Sitting Bull extended a hand soft as a woman's, softer than a squaw's.

What followed was more surprising still. Irvine's escort withdrew on one side, the cloud of Indian fighting men on the other. Sitting Bull presented an elaborate peace-pipe to the commissioner. Irvine puffed away at it, then Sitting Bull, who thereafter shook out the ashes and solemnly buried them. The pipe was broken to pieces and strewn over the spot.

THIS ceremony completed, the time was ripe for the commissioner to speak. After some moments of flowery generalities, he came tactfully to the point of his errand:

"The Great Mother welcomes the Sioux people to her land. That welcome will continue kind and warm, so long as the Sioux maintain the spirit befitting guests."

"Good. That means forever," said Sitting Bull. "We come with hands raised and open, seeking only peace. It is not we who desired battle in the land that was our home. Battle was forced upon us by the greed and treachery of the Long Knives—the Long Knives with forked tongues."

"The tongue of the Great Mother is not forked," averred Irvine with emphasis.

"She will not render us back into the hands of our enemies?"

"No; not so long as the Sioux obey the rules of hospitality, and remember the courtesy properly due from guests to host."

"Good. The Great Mother warms my heart, She has a woman's eye for color," said Sitting Bull dryly, his glance fixing upon Irvine's scarlet tunic. "I approve. Tell the Great Queen that the Sioux already swell with love

and admiration for their White Grandmother."

Assistant Commissioner Irvine pitched tent near the scene of the interview in a pardonable glow of duty well performed. This glow was not diminished by the report of his interpreter that the Indians were happier than they had been for many a weary month.

To cap the climax came another proof that the lion was indeed metamorphosed into the gentle lamb. Toward midnight the commissioner received a surprise visit in his tent from Sitting Bull. The warlock sat on the edge of his bed and with an almost childlike simplicity and confidence poured forth his myriad grievances against the Long Knives.

The heart-to-heart confessional lasted well into the small hours. It prompted Irvine to state enthusiastically of Sitting Bull in his report:

"I have but little doubt of his future conduct if he remains here, which he assuredly will."

Beneath his soldierly exterior, Colonel Irvine himself was a gentleman to the bone. Moreover, his acquaintance with the moody, fickle wizard of the Uncapapas was extremely limited.

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ANOTHER spring had come and blended into summer. Inspector Beverly Allen's "D" Troop detachment at Wood's End was still subsisting on beans; and had managed to keep its wilderness empire in order, as it tried to subsist on that monotonous diet.

During the twelvemonth, however, the mist of hushed suspense and brooding evil which clutched the region had thickened appreciably. The Sioux hordes had pushed east into it. Headquarters, reflecting Irvine's confidence, remained imbued with cheerful hope. But in closer contact with the threat, Inspector Allen secretly was not so comfortable. Twenty men, whatever their traditions and however brave, form none too stout a bulwark against five thousand lusty, war-bred primitives.

There had been no more mail from home. And at times the picture of his wife and daughter stabbed like a lance of fire to the inspector's heart, although he never, by look or gesture, revealed his own suffering to the force under him.

Allen's scouts made unencouraging reports. The strain of diplomacy and good behavior was telling on the Sioux. Restless by nature, the reminders of other people's affluence constantly dangling before their eyes made them doubly so. There were the horses, for instance, whole herds of them—sometimes grazing with a sub-constable for sole protector.

Straight-Young-Man, one of the Sioux sub-chiefs, reached a pass where the mere sight of a loose horse belonging to the Mounted sent him into a convulsion of mingled rage and eagerness. He was a gifted horse-thief, but nowadays his gifts were useless. Two score similarly talented young bucks comprised his band.

It was inevitable that sooner or later trouble would come.

Corporal Bryce, in charge of the detachment's saddle-stock, was hard put to it to find adequate grazing land as June slipped into sun-scorched July. He wrangled the herd farther and farther into the wilderness, away from Allen's stockade, and the eyes of Straight-Young-Man's companions watched proceedings greedily.

Toward late afternoon, one day, the corporal was in his shelter tent, indus-

triously scribbling a letter that might reach the folks in Montreal for Christmas. The two sub-constables on duty were stretched out under a tree, whence they could watch the herd of fifty horses grazing in a little clearing below them, and at the same time take life easy.

The herd drifted slowly and peacefully toward the far end of the clearing. Suddenly Constable White raised up on an elbow and nudged his companion.

"Look, Jim."

Constable Travis looked. "What's the excitement?"

"I thought I saw a couple of Injuns slinking in the underbrush. By Jupiter—"

He bounded erect. The bushes at the far end of the clearing had erupted not two but a dozen lithe brown forms. Straight-Young-Man and his bucks had waited until the leading horses were almost within arm's reach before they dashed into the open. The gentled horses pulled up snorting, but the Indians were already upon them, twisting buckskin thongs about their lower jaws as makeshift bridles, and leaping on their backs.

White bolted down the incline, with Travis at his heels, and vaulted aboard his pony. Travis's mount, unfortunately, had wandered farther off. It took the constable an extra precious minute to round him up and start in pursuit of the horse-thieves.

White flung full-tilt at the receding savages, shouting anathema. The horse Straight-Young-Man had selected was proving intractable. It delayed his flight sufficiently for the constable to draw alongside. White leaned from the saddle and closed his muscular arms about the Indian. Straight-Young-Man jerked loose, snatched out a revolver, and brought it smashing down upon the Mountie's skull with a force not to be denied.

WHITE reeled for an instant, managed to recover, and pulled out his own gun. At this juncture Constable Travis arrived flying. Instead of continuing the pursuit he swerved toward White and savagely clutched the latter's extended arm.

"Chop it, you damned fool!" he shouted. "Remember orders! We don't shoot first! D'you want to start a wholesale massacre?"

White flushed as he fought to control his excited horse. In that brief interval self-control returned.

"You're right, Bob. Sorry I delayed you. The devils have made their get-away!"

Corporal Bryce, warned by the shouting that something was amiss, now came up at a gallop. His jaw thrust grimly forward at Travis's brief report.

"Right, Bob. You and Jim stick with the horses. I'll hit the trail."

He started in the wake of the horse-thieves. There was no doubt in Corporal Bryce's mind as to what he intended to do. Twelve or twelve thousand Indians notwithstanding, he was going to bring those horses back again.

Sitting Bull's camp lay twenty miles distant. Obviously the Sioux horse-thieves would head for it. Corporal Bryce also took the most direct trail for this objective.

By the time he had covered ten miles anger gave way to the acumen which had merited his corporal's stripes. Here was a matter of the most profound significance. It was not his place to indulge blind instinct, force an issue, and make the caldron boil. Discretion was the thing.

He diverted to the cabin of a friendly, English-speaking breed.

"Sioux bucks have run off some of our horses," he explained. "I want you, Jules, to go at once to Sitting Bull. Tell him for me that if he returns the horses we will forget the incident. But his young men must return our animals at once."

The corporal awaited the return of his messenger impatiently. Dusk was gathering when at last the half-breed appeared, apprehension plainly depicted upon his face.

"Sitting Bull was very angry," he muttered. "He says the Red-coats are to keep their distance. His young men are not to be disturbed."

Bryce smiled grimly. "So that's the tune he's singing, eh?"

"*Oui, m'sieur.*" The breed shivered, as though he had passed through a terrific ordeal. "And I myself think it would be wise if those horses were forgotten."

"You don't say! Why?"

"As I passed through the camp, I saw—" again the breed shivered, and crossed himself—"hundreds of Sitting Bull's young men painting their faces for war."

Corporal Bryce grew exceedingly thoughtful. The waste was indeed rubbing a corner of the tinder-box! The plunder of police horses could not go unrequited without a complete demoralization of police control. And yet—

He realized, with substantial force, that the situation was far above and beyond the scope of a mere corporal. Hence two hours later he was standing before his officer, quietly describing what had occurred.

Inspector Allen heard him through inscrutably. Then:

"Your line of action, corporal, was proper and commendable. However, we cannot permit even Sitting Bull to get away with this." He spoke as gravely, as authoritatively as though he were a general, with a division of soldiers at call, instead of twenty men, pitted against a far-flung wilderness and full five thousand savages with passions at the boiling-point. "Sergeant Pierce! I want a detail of twelve men; full equipment and dress uniform; they are to be prepared to ride with me at dawn."

ALL night long commotion swirled in the vast camp of Sitting Bull. In eerie chorus groups of braves lifted their voices to descant their battle prowess to the night. Drum-beats rolled in waves of shuddering sound along the lines of serried tepees to the great central war-lodge, where the chief magician himself was said to be brewing powerful medicine.

There was no reason why Sitting Bull should not be gratified with his position. He was master of a wilderness which, though differing in nature, was no whit less in broad, majestic expanse than his lamented plains. In this realm was no one to dispute his sway, excepting a bare handful of red-coated men; the merest quirk of a finger, and his hordes would swallow them!

An hour after first light a runner sprinted up to the war-lodge and flung inside. Rumors of the tidings he brought spread rapidly. From all sides warriors, mounted and in full regalia, began to converge toward the war-lodge.

The flap opened, and Sitting Bull crawled forth. His face was sullen. His eyes glittered with a malign light. In silence he mounted, and, in the center of a wild, impressive cavalcade,

rode slowly across the open level beneath his camp.

A wooded knoll formed the far side of the level. Among the trees of this knoll, sharply silhouetted against the brightening sky, a thin line of horsemen suddenly was visible. Ahead of the line trotted two other riders—Inspector Allen and his interpreter.

The rising sun shone bravely on the red coats of the approaching men, on their white crossed belts, white helmets and gloves. Scrub-brush and pipe-clay had served to gloss over mercifully the general dilapidation of their sartorial splendor, particularly the scarecrow pants. Each trooper carried a Snider carbine across his saddle-bow, and the Adams revolver at his side.

For all its martial pomp and color, though, the group was but a straw against the teeming horde of the Indians. Yet it advanced steadily, and with crisp, dapper purpose.

Inspector Allen glimpsed Sitting Bull, back in the thickest ruck of warriors, and snapped an order. The men behind him bunched into a wedge.

Straight through a mass of milling, glaring savages the wedge thrust, halting at Allen's command within a few feet of the warlock. If a thrilling tension, or numbing anxiety, clutched the heartstrings of these red-coated men, there was no indication upon their countenances. These were no more nor less impassive than on parade.

Allen spurred up to the side of Sitting Bull. If there swam before the mind's eye of the Mounted officer the image of the woman he loved, whom he well might never clasp in his hungry arms again, it was not evident in his cool, fearless glance.

For an instant the two warriors regarded each other, the Indian's gaze flashing, sinister, Allen's continuing calm and level-eyed. Neither made a motion of greeting.

"WE come as friends," said the inspector then through the half-breed Provost, his interpreter, "but Sitting Bull knows why we are here."

"Why should I know?" the warlock demanded. "I did not seek a meeting, nor wish it. The Redcoat can see that my young men are restless. He was unwise to come."

"Yesterday," said Allen calmly, without removing his eyes from that sullen visage, "Sitting Bull's young men took horses belonging to the Great Queen. A message was sent him that if the animals were returned at once the incident would be forgotten. Instead, he sent back word defending his young men—and did not send the horses."

To this there was no reply. Sitting Bull shrewdly desired Allen to do the forcing. He got his wish.

"Silence means that Sitting Bull cannot dispute these facts. It is well. Let Sitting Bull remember that he remains here solely at the pleasure of the Great Queen. Her laws have not been changed to meet the whims of Sitting Bull. It is her will that he return the horses here and now."

The Indian grunted. It was obvious that he felt in an ugly mood. Two thousand fiercely expectant warriors abetted it.

"Sitting Bull knows nothing of the Great Queen's horses," he replied; and added, with a flash of viciousness: "And if he did know, and did not desire to return them, does the Redcoat think perhaps that he could *take* them from Sitting Bull?"

The spark had struck. Police authority throughout all Canada balanced

delicately on Allen's trim back. The inspector could not hesitate.

"I would take Sitting Bull's own horse if I knew that it was stolen," he retorted in a firm, strong voice.

The Indian's stained teeth bared in a contemptuous yet calculating grin.

"It is," he said succinctly.

The spark had leaped to flame! Inspector Allen had expected it. He had also decided that the charge of tarnishing the honor of the Mounted should never lie with him.

Gradually, during the last few instants, he had been edging his horse closer and closer to the Indian. Now the taunter's challenge was accepted with a blazing suddenness.

Allen leaned sidewise. His arms closed with a clamp of iron around the body of Sitting Bull. In the same breath the warlock was swung clear of his saddle and dumped roughly on the ground. Inspector Allen whirled and trotted back to his escort, leading the riderless horse.

A paralyzed hush, far more dramatic than the deafening uproar so shortly to ensue, gripped the scene. Sitting Bull's person was sacred. For a moment dumb stupefaction clogged the senses of his tribesmen. They were unable to credit the testimony of their eyes.

Not so the Mounted. Like trained veterans, they made the most of a breathless opportunity. When the hush ended they had wedged their horses in a ring about their officer. The group was trotting for the wooded knoll.

The whoops and yowls of the infuriated warriors, in their thousands, welled to the upper skies. A press of bodies flung at the Mounted, compressing it like a kernel in the shell. Fists flailed into the faces of the redcoats, quirts slashed them, nails clawed at their eyes.

"No shooting!" the voice of Inspector Allen clearly topped the din.

The Mounties reversed their carbines and battered stubbornly through an unending nightmare of plunging, writhing bodies with the gun butts.

It was a miracle that they had ever managed to penetrate to the vicinity of Sitting Bull. That they could fight their way out again through his shrieking horde to temporary safety, without the loss of a man, was thrice miraculous. But, shouting, striking, disentangling, retreating, ultimately they did cleave through the wild mêlée, won to the flimsy shelter of their little woods stockade, and rammed the gate shut behind them.

Now, at last, a sigh of relief issued simultaneously from several police throats. One or two constables even grinned happily.

But Allen did not grin. He saw too keenly into the immediate future. He tossed the reins of Sitting Bull's pony —emblem of dangerous victory!—to the trooper nearest him.

"Slide this into the stable. The rest of you snap into getting the post in shape for defense. If you think we've seen the last of Sitting Bull's young men you're in for damned rough disillusionment!"

THE sun set, for the last time, according to the laws of logic, as far as Allen's detachment was concerned. And promptly with twilight the wheel of fate began to turn. Vast pools of shadow, far deeper than the evening's gloom, formed on the bench above the fort.

A piercing whoop rang out. The shadows spread and whirled in a dance macabre—became waves of mounted Indians pounding back and forth. Guns cracked. The dusk filled with an

insensate, shuddering clamor as the braves worked themselves into the frenzy for an overwhelming assault.

Under Allen's unflurried supervision the police long since had prepared for the finale as thoroughly as possible. Every spare vessel had been filled with water; extra ammunition cases had been buried; letters to families and friends written and cached in an iron box. Allen had bravely written his own farewell to his wife and the child he would never see now.

The troopers crouched at points of vantage in their barrack room. If the protracted strain tanged at the nerves of the younger recruits, no indication was manifest outwardly.

And so, a quiet riffle in the center of a raging whirlpool, the Mounties played a waiting game, until lead from the weapons of Sitting Bull's young bucks began to rip the colors on the flagpole above the little stockade. Then, indeed, Allen sensed an ominous wave of motion in the sea of gloom.

"Steady, men," he bade. "No shooting unless we are convinced there is no other way."

Note that "unless"—the casual, dauntless voice of scarlet nonchalance!

"How about a light?" inquired some one presently. "Let's show 'em we're not worrying."

Inspector Allen laughed composedly. "We'll demonstrate that better without a light. The inference is that we have gone to bed. You can light matches all you please, though; smoke, chat, relax; enjoy this touch of genuine atmosphere. It's rare enough, nowadays."

Outside the bedlam increased. Chants, yowls, snarls, the rattle of rifle volleys. Provost, the 'breed interpreter, explained phlegmatically:

"The brave young men of Sitting Bull tell what they intend to do to you. It is not nice. First they will scalp you at the stake. Then cut out your hearts. Then give your red coats to the squaws."

"How int'restin'," breathed Sergeant Pierce ironically.

Two hours dragged past, two aching eternities. Inaction, under the lash of torment, is a real test of discipline. No wisp of sound trickled from the unlit barracks; but when, at last, a concerted war-whoop welled from the engulfing blackness like a surging wave, the Mounties filled with hope—hope that for better or for worse the end had come! A score of hands gripped the Snider carbine stocks so tightly the finger knuckles drained white.

An all-pervading, complete and sinister hush succeeded the whoop.

"What now?" Inspector Allen queried of Provost.

"I do not know," replied the half-breed. Then, as the lull continued: "But I go see."

The barracks formed one side of the stockade. Provost rose, slid to an open window, and vanished.

Five throbbing minutes; ten. Again the window was blotted out by a clambering form. Provost had made it back successfully.

"I find Chief Broad Tail," calmly reported the interpreter. "The squaws are running all around him, screaming to his young men: 'Lend us your breech-clouts and we will choke the cousins of the Long Knives.' But Broad Tail wishes speech with you."

INSPECTOR ALLEN suppressed an exclamation. Young Chief Broad Tail, he knew, had for some time been a thorn in the side of Sitting Bull. He was one of those who had grown tired of the great warlock's medicine.

"Where is he?"

Provost vaguely indicated the night beyond the window.

Promptly the keen-witted inspector came to a decision.

"Into your bunks, lads," he called, "every man-jack of you! Stay there until further orders. Right, Provost, invite the chief inside. When you get him through the window, light a candle and escort him through the barracks to the orderly room. You boys turn loose a few artistic snores to help the game along."

Allen chuckled audibly and vanished. There was a general scurry as the Mounted wonderingly pulled off boots and tunics, and drew the blankets around their necks.

Chief Broad Tail found the inspector writing leisurely and imperturbably in the orderly room. The Indian's face was inexpressive, but his eyes showed a perplexity mingled with subtle respect.

"Well?" inquired Allen calmly. "What can we do for you?"

Broad Tail's wonderment increased. It took him some time to frame a suitable reply.

"Sitting Bull is very angry," he averred at length. "He wishes to scalp the redcoats."

Inspector Allen looked at him a moment, then grinned. "Yes?"

The Indian's perplexity vanished, together with any lingering trace of malice. The grin had been too much for him. He also smiled.

"But Broad Tail is not so anxious," he declared. "No. He is weary of Sitting Bull's perpetual war medicine. It pleases him that you plucked a few feathers so neatly from the bonnet of Sitting Bull. So he has instructed his young men not to molest the redcoats any more."

"Broad Tail is wise," observed the inspector easily.

"And without my young men, I do not think that Sitting Bull will press his anger farther," concluded the Indian.

With elaborate difficulty, Allen smothered a yawn.

"Ah, yes. The Great Queen doubtless will be pleased to hear that Broad Tail is not as childish as Sitting Bull."

There was a moment of silence. Then:

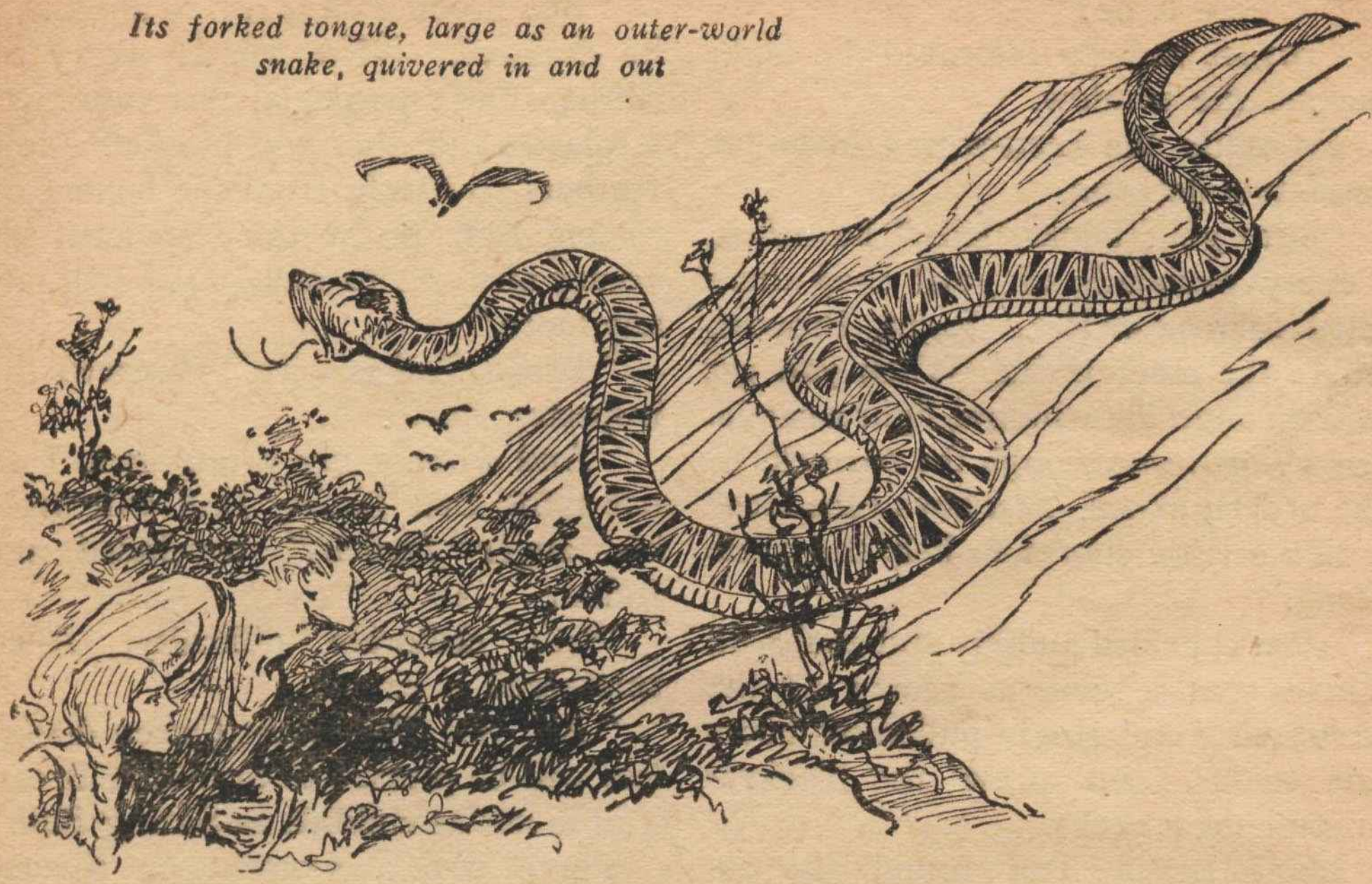
"I told him I was coming to talk to you," gravely remarked the Indian. "What message shall I take back to him?"

Allen turned to a shelf behind the desk and took down a pound tin of tobacco, which he graciously tendered the Indian—his expression that of a father giving a lollipop to a good little boy.

"Sitting Bull?" murmured the inspector carelessly. "Oh, tell him we don't mind his playfulness, but I do wish he'd cut down a little on the noise. The sons of the Great Mother work hard, and they need their sleep."

Thus Broad Tail withdrew, humbled and marveling. Allen's magnificent bluff had worked!

THE END.



Its forked tongue, large as an outer-world snake, quivered in and out

The Radio Gun-Runners

Americans, cast away inside the Earth, match modern science against a topsy-turvy world of Vikings and forgotten dinosaurs

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "The Radio Flyers," "The Radio Planet," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JIMMY LEFAVOUR, best known as Scarface Boston Jimmy, and his crew of gun-runners hijack the yacht Miami, off Newfoundland, and transfer the guns from their sinking boat. The Miami is caught in the polar ice, and an opening to the northward leads them over the edge of the world. They find that the story of the Radio Flyers, who claimed there is no north pole, was true. Instead, there is a huge opening over whose rim the sea flows into the inside of the earth, which is a hollow shell with a small central sun.

Here they find the continent inhabited by prehistoric beasts, and fought over by Vikings and the Eskimo-like natives, the Skraelings. The Vikings are ruled by their boy bishop, Nils Uppri, and their *yarls*, or earls, among whom are the Radio Flyers, Eric Redmond and Angus Selkirk.

Nick Fratelli mutinies and gets away with the Miami. Scarface, with the Harvard yachtsman Tom Jones, the Cambridge cop Mike Murphy, and Scarface's fellow-gangster Little Arty, ex-jockey and radio bug, joins the Vikings of Angus Selkirk's plateau city.

This story began in the Argosy for February 22.

Theresa Ferreira, daughter of the late navigator of the Miami, is with them, and seems attracted to the young Bishop Uppri, much to Tom Jones's discomfort; but she learns his title, and is horrified, despite Nils's attempts to convince her that Viking bishops are not celibates, being more kings than religious dignitaries.

Scarface goes scouting with a Viking aviator in one of their motorless gliders, which fly great distances on the air currents after the fashion of the native pterodactyls, or *skwaas*. They find Nick Fratelli has joined Altoonah, the Skraeling chief, in a plot to kidnap Eric's wife Helga, who is en route to the northern plateau city. As they attempt to bomb the Miami, the aviator is killed, and Scarface crashes with the glider into the sea.

CHAPTER XIV.

PIRACY.

ON the Miami, Swede was saying to Nick and Cicero, "I tank it vos Yimmy."

"Then why the hell didn't you and Cicero pot him, instead of the Viking?" ejaculated Fratelli disgustedly.

"But it couldn't possibly have been Jimmy—he don't know how to fly."

"Beginner's luck," explained Cicero Tony sagely, adding, "But we got the Viking, anyhow."

"Yah, ve got him," assented Swede, but he didn't seem particularly elated about it. He seemed to have a growing fellow-feeling for these tall blond Norsemen.

"Look, there he crashes!" shouted Nick. "Quick, Cicero, the engines! I'll take the wheel."

But though they searched the water, and even the near-by shore, with great care, they found no trace of their former leader. Finally they gave up the search, and returned to their anchorage. Nick Fratelli was elated. His usually sour features glowed.

"Dead, that's a cinch!" he chortled. "This gets rid of the only man in this country with more brains than I got. I'll be the Vikings' king—I'll be their emperor—why, I may even be their Mussolini!"

Following the attack by the glider, Nick, Altoonah and the impromptu interpreter Friday conferred again, while Charley Loy, assisted by several of the Skraelings, prepared a delectable venison stew, of a colossal prehistoric Irish elk, with chopped breadfruit to take the place of both potatoes and chestnuts, and with bits of orange-peel to give it an acid tang.

The result was really a work of culinary art, and was hailed as a great success by the members of both races. Try it, the next time you kill an Irish elk where there are breadfruit in abundance.

Finally the terms of the alliance were concluded, and the bargain was sealed by the two chiefs solemnly clasping hands over a ring, a Viking custom, one of the many copied by the Skraeling chief. They had to use a deck-ring for the purpose, no other sort of large ring being available.

Then all the remaining rifles, about a hundred in number, were unloaded from the hold, and the pick of Altoonah's warriors, who had by this time arrived, were selected as a rifle company, to be trained under the personal instruction of the three gangsters. This rifle company consisted of one hundred and fifty savages, so as to allow for casualties and still keep the strength up to the available number of Springfields.

The picked Skraeling warriors were very proud of having been chosen, and were anxious to try out the rifles at once; but Nick Fratelli knew from World War experience that recruits should not be given firearms until they had mastered at least the rudiments of discipline and squad-movements.

Nick was not worrying about any attack from the Vikings just yet. The Vikings would probably wait for two or three days before sending out a searching party or another glider; and he could count on about three days additional thereafter, before the enemy would arrive on the scene, for he calculated that his present position was three days' march from the plateau.

Given thus the five or six days leeway that he expected, he could whip his new troops into such shape so that, if they did not break and run at the first attack, their hundred rifles, shooting however wild, would be more than a match for the four to six which the Vikings could muster.

The gangster issued rifles and a little ammunition to Altoonah and his bodyguard, more as an evidence of good faith than because they could be expected to know how to use them.

IN the morning—which of course was marked by no sunrise, but merely by enough of them waking up to disturb and rouse the others—the squads were formed again, and Nick, in the august presence of King Altoonah and his staff, began the superhuman task of making modern soldiers out of a rabble of naked savages. Yet superhuman as it was, it was absolutely essential to his plans of conquest.

According to Nick's calculations, the enemy against whom he was training these men were still in their rocky fortress many miles to the northward; whereas, in actuality, the enemy were almost upon him.

A fairly level bowlder-dotted field bordered the beach, where the Skraeling horde stood, or reclined, or squatted. In the center of the field were drawn up the two ranks of the incipient rifle company. In front of them, in a group, stood Nick the Rat, with Cicero, Swede and Friday. Also Altoonah, the Skraeling chieftain, with his bodyguard. Charley Loy leaned over the ship's rail, an interested spectator.

Nick issued the commands, with explanations assisted by Friday. Altoonah reënforced his authority.

That edge of the field furthest from the sea was backed by a ledge of rocks, topped by a thicket of small trees; and from this thicket a score or more of hostile eyes took in every detail of the scene below.

Tom Jones, Mike Murphy and Little Arty—-for they were among these spies in the thicket—withdrew stealthily out of earshot, and discussed the situation. The Viking commander of the expedition withdrew with them, although of course he could not contribute very much to the discussion.

"Altoonah?" they asked him.

"*Yah,*" he replied, for he had recognized the crutches.

Then said Tom, "Nick has made an alliance with the Skraeling king, just as we feared. Nick carries his right arm in a sling. Swede's left hand and Cicero's right shoulder are bandaged. And we found Scutari dead back there. So I guess our five Vikings did some very creditable fighting before they were finally slaughtered by modern firearms. But what is more to the point, these wounds mean that none of the three white men is very formidable with a rifle right now. And none of the three has his rifle with

him at the moment. Altoonah and the savages grouped around him have rifles; but, as they must have got them off the Miami, I doubt if any of them has the slightest idea how to use them, except possibly Altoonah himself, and he'd have difficulty handling one on crutches. We four have rifles, know how to use them, and are uninjured. Shall we wait for reënforcements, while Nick arms and trains these savages, or shall we sneak back to the edge of the ridge and shoot up the party?"

"The Skraelings will probably attack us, the moment we open fire," answered Murphy. "There are enough of them to overpower us in spite of our guns."

"Yeah?" sneered Little Arty. "Scared of getting nudged by a hunk of lead, are you? Well, if we bump off the wop, and the squarehead, and Cicero, what difference will it make what happens to *us* after that? Where is your nerve, flat-foot?"

"Let's go," said Tom.

"It's okeh with me," the ex-cop, stung, hastened to agree.

"That makes it anonymous," said the little jockey. "Come on."

Turning to the Viking, Tom patted his own rifle, pointed in the direction of the enemy, crooked his finger a number of times, and said brilliantly, "Bang, bang, bang!"

The Viking smiled and nodded.

"*Yah!*" said he.

THE four of them crawled back to the top of the ledge. The positions of the enemy were practically unchanged. Tom pointed out to the Viking the group on which they were to fire first. Then all four drew a careful bead on Nick Fratelli. It seemed inevitable that at least one of them would be sure to bring down their victim.

But at just that moment they, or some of their followers, were glimpsed by one of the Skraelings.

"Vikings!" rang out the cry.

Instantly the scene on the plain below shifted like a kaleidoscope.

Altoonah might not be versed in modern squad-formations, but, in spite of his inheriting the rank from his father Goovah, he could not have held his kingship over the wild hordes if he had not developed an uncanny ability to direct large bodies of men on the field of battle.

A few words of command shouted by him, and his warriors were charging in a body up the slope. Instinctively Tom, Mike, Arty and their ally depressed their muzzles to aim at the coming attack, and only too late realized that they ought to have pulled their triggers at Nick Fratelli before doing so. Back up swung their muzzles. But Nick and his two henchmen and even Altoonah had taken advantage of the respite to drop behind protecting bowlders. Friday had joined the rush of the Skraelings.

The four on the ledge now fired repeatedly into the oncoming mob, but their shots stopped only individuals. Rather than be engulfed, they slowly fell back inland. Their plan having failed, there was no point in their remaining to be massacred.

As the first impetuousness of the Skraeling charge wore off, the savages advanced more cautiously, and this enabled the Vikings to collect their forces and beat an orderly retreat. They knew, which their assailants did not, that they were falling back upon reënforcements.

Altoonah's bodyguard had instinctively dropped their rifles and reverted

to their native spears, when the fighting started. Their king alone kept hold of his firearm, and had hobbled after his men as soon as the Vikings had been driven from their position.

Crawling cautiously from behind their protective rocks, the three gangsters recovered the fallen guns, took them back to the ship and passed them up to Charley Loy.

"We really ought to get into this fight," stated Nick, standing on the beach and looking back toward the battle.

"Vy?" asked Swede.

"Well, it's our fight," explained Nick. "If it weren't for these damn' wounds, we could make those crooks eat lead."

"Let's get out of here while the getting is good," suggested Cicero shamelessly.

"I suppose Altoonah really doesn't need any help," ruminated Nick. "He's got enough men to do them Vikings up, in spite of their guns. We ought to be off after Helga Redmond anyhow. You two go on board and get the Miami ready to start, while I have a word with Altoonah."

And he lumbered off in the direction of the fighting.

Altoonah was too canny to lead a charge against modern firearms, especially in his crippled condition, so Fratelli found him in the rear directing the attack. In a few hurried words their plans were made.

Altoonah was to turn over the command to a lieutenant, and with nine picked men was to return to the Miami, which was then to start south to intercept the ship bearing Helga Redmond. When the Skraelings had annihilated Tom Jones's party of Vikings, the prospective rifle company were to march south along the shore, keeping an eye out for the Miami. The rest of the Skraelings were to go into camp and hold off as long as possible any counter-attacking parties of Vikings.

These plans decided on, Altoonah turned over the command and gave the necessary instructions to his lieutenant. Friday was located in the mêlée, and the group went back to the boat, which they found with engines purring, all ready to depart.

SO they set out to the southward, and it was not long before they sighted the painted sail and high prow of the Viking freighter, bound north. She was making good headway, under the influence of her oars and a following wind.

As the motor yacht approached, all those on the Viking ship who were neither rowing nor steering, crowded forward to see the strange sight—a boat moving at an unbelievable speed, without either sails or oars. Among the Vikings could be seen a regal young woman, richly dressed, with rich yellow hair.

The Miami sped by, then circled, and slowing down her speed to that of the Viking craft, drew up alongside. Nick Fratelli was at the wheel, Cicero at the engines, Swede and Friday at the bow machine gun, and Altoonah, with only his shield and crutches, beside them in the bow. The rest of the Skraelings and Charley Loy were ranged along the deck, aft.

Nick had never felt so short-handed. He needed Cicero both at the engines and to assist Swede with the bow machine gun, where Friday was but a poor substitute. He would have liked to have manned the stern gun, too, but that was out of the question.

Some of the Vikings were nervously fitting arrows to their bows, as Altoo-

nah began the conversation. It was dangerous, coming thus within range of the enemy, but the swish of the oars and the chug of the motor made intercourse impossible out of bowshot, so the chance had to be taken.

"Who is in command?" shouted Altoonah in Norse.

Helga Redmond stepped to the rail and replied, "I, the Princess Helga. What sort of a godless ship is yours, that sails without sails, and rows without oars? Who are you? And come you for peace or for war?"

"We come for peace, most beautiful Helga," answered the Skraeling chieftain. "This boat is the magic ship of the Innuits, which we have built to prove our superiority over your people, who still rely on clumsy sails and oars. Do you not recognize your former lover, the great Altoonah, King of the Innuits? I have come for you, Helga Uppri, as I promised when you married Eric Redmond."

"You are vile," shouted the princess. "If you do not at once withdraw the insult, I shall have you shot, unarmed and a cripple though you be. The wife of Eric Redmond, and the daughter of Thorvald Uppri, is not for any Skraeling scum."

Now it never does to call a Skraeling a "Skraeling," for their word for themselves is "Innuits." "Skraeling" is like the French word for the Germans, namely "Boches."

Yet Altoonah smiled as he answered, "And Altoonah is not unarmed. You know the magic slingshots which Eric and Angus brought from the mythical land beyond the northern ice? Well, we Innuits have an even greater weapon, which can devastate your entire ship's company at one blast. If you will come peaceably aboard us, we shall spare their lives. Otherwise they die."

Helga's reply was a sharp command, and the twang of many bowstrings, and the hum of many arrows.

CHAPTER XV.

WAR TO THE HILT.

AS the strings of Helga's bowmen twanged, Altoonah, with the speed of light, swung his protecting shield in front of himself and his two companions. The arrows clattered harmlessly off it.

"Spare the girl! Fire!" he shouted.

Swede heard and understood. Before the archers could reload, the machine gun was belching flame to a staccato accompaniment.

As Friday fed in the belts of ammunition, Swede swept the stream of bullets along the deck of the Viking ship like the stream of water from a garden hose. One traverse of the deck, and not a person stood alive on it except Helga. Then a sweep back at a slightly lower level, and every rower on the near side slumped in his seat.

Right through the shields, hung along the gunwales, cut the singing bullets, and many of them reached even the rowers on the farther side. The rowing stopped. Quick as a flash, the Miami was steered alongside the Viking ship, crunching the oars between the two boats; and then Swede and Friday clambered aboard, followed by Altoonah, agile of arm despite his palsied legs.

But as they came, Helga snatched a jeweled dagger from the gold chain which encircled her waist, and held it aloft, its tip pointed not at the enemy, but at her own breast. Suddenly left alone amid the shambles that had a moment before been her brave and lusty countrymen, what did there remain for

her but death? Even death were preferable to captivity with a member of the despised race of Skraelings, king though he was.

But, just as the dagger fell, there stepped to her side four oarsmen, the only ones who still remained alive out of all the carnage. With drawn swords they sprang to defend their princess to the death and one of them snatched the knife from her hand.

Then the automatics of Swede and Friday barked several times, and Altoonah hobbled to the side of the fainting Helga. Every other Viking lay dead or dying.

Altoonah's Skraelings now surged over the side, slit the throats of the wounded, and pillaged the boat, finding amid the loot enough provisions to stock the Miami for a month.

Helga's inert form was carried into the cabin by Swede and Friday, and her hands were shackled with the decidedly convenient handcuffs which formerly had belonged to Policeman Murphy. Swede brought water and threw it in the girl's face.

When her senses had thoroughly been restored, she sat up on the couch where they had laid her, and fearlessly faced Altoonah, Swede, and Friday. Fratelli, who had left the boat drifting, had also come to look at the captive.

As Fratelli gazed at her, his eyes narrowed, and the face of Helga Redmond eclipsed that of Theresa Ferreira from his mind. Not that he altogether abandoned his lust for little Terry, but rather he formulated the idea of establishing a harem, as king of this country, and of having Helga as his principal and favorite wife. This, of course, would necessitate getting rid of Altoonah, instead of using him as an ally; but doubtless that slight matter could be arranged, all in due time.

Luckily Altoonah did not catch Nick's look; but Swede did, and it intensified his growing dislike for his boss. Ever since Swede had come in contact with the Norsemen of the interior of the earth's shell, he had felt an ancestral urge calling across the centuries, to draw him closer to these people of his own race and blood. This girl was a Viking and a lady. Swede was a descendant of Vikings, although not exactly a gentleman. Nick the Rat was only scum, according to Swede's views.

It was all right for Altoonah to aspire to the lady's hand, for Altoonah was a king, even though he was a Skraeling and a cripple. But Nick Fratelli was a different matter. Swede began to wish that he had stuck with Scarface Boston Jimmy. Then, in a moment, he was glad he had not, for here he might be of service to one of his own kind. Swede was rapidly turning the clock back eight hundred years.

SOUNDS of confusion were heard on deck outside.

"You guard the skirt, Swede," commanded Fratelli, "while the king and I go out and quiet his Innuits, who seem to be staging a roughhouse. You can understand her lingo. Perhaps you can pump some ideas out of her that may be of use to us."

When the two allies had left, Swede with as gentlemanly an air as he could muster, began in his native tongue, "Gracious lady—"

Helga jumped, and interjected. "So you are what my Eric calls a Svenska, one of the Vikings of the outside world, like my Eric. That horrid man, who leered at me, looks like a Skraeling, although he wears the clothes of the outer world. So does the man who boarded my ship with you and Altoonah. So

does one other whom I saw standing with the native warriors in the stern of your ship during the battle."

She smiled wryly at the word "battle," and went on, "rather, massacre. But you look like a Viking, and your voice sounds like one. Tell me, what are you doing in such evil company? Are you a renegade to your own people?"

Swede listened, enthralled and concerned.

"Gracious lady," he replied in the nearest approach he could make to Norse, "I was not always one of these men. I was born in Sweden."

"Your language is so like that of my Eric when he first came to these lands," said she, "that I am sure you must be a brave and good man like him. What is your name, Viking?"

"Yon Yonson, gracious lady," he replied. "And my life is at your service."

"Then you must get me out of here," she pleaded, "away from those awful men."

By this time, the noise outside had subsided, and Nick and Altoonah reentered. As they came in, Nick was making some bombastic remark to his ally, and translated it for Swede's benefit.

Said Nick, "I was telling him that one Italian was a match for a hundred Vikings."

It was the wrong time to make a remark like that to Johnson.

"It vos a Swede and a Eskimo did it, though," remonstrated the latter.

"Yeah?" replied Fratelli. "Well, get this: it was an Italian's brains that directed the whole show."

"I tank—" began Swede.

"Shut up," exclaimed Nick. "None of that line now. How are you getting along with the moll?"

"I tank she tell me a lot."

"All right, pump her dry. Then guard the door. When you get too tired, come and wake Cicero to take your place."

The other two withdrew, and soon the engines could be heard throbbing again. At last the boat slowed, orders were given outside with much running to and fro, and the anchor dropped. Footsteps retired aft, and then silence. The victors were resting.

Swede turned to the captive princess and said: "I tank ve go ashore." Then in Swedish, "Oh, excuse me. I talked the wrong language. Every one will be asleep soon. They plan to go north in the morning to join Altoonah's army."

"Then we must flee north," interjected Helga.

"No! South," asserted Swede, surprised at her suggestion.

"Don't you see?" explained Helga. "They know that you know that they are going north. So they will expect us to flee in the other direction. Accordingly, they will pursue us south; and, if we have gone north, we shall escape."

It was too subtle for Yon Yonson. "Maybe so."

IT seemed absurd to be sneaking away from the ship in broad daylight. But after an interval the two tiptoed out of the cabin into the mess-room. There Swede paused and scratched his head for a moment, then whispered, "We've got to take a chance on waking them, for we can't go without food and weapons."

So he tiptoed into the bunk room, presently emerging with two rifles, two ammunition belts, two automatic pistols, two packs, and a broad grin.

Leading Helga onto the deck, and

handing her all the equipment except one pistol and belt, and the two packs, he signed to her to stand still, and then he sneaked aft to the door of the galley. There he paused and shook his head sadly for a moment; but finally, pulling himself together, he entered. The cause of his hesitation had been that the Chinaman was sitting asleep in a chair tilted back against the wall, directly across the galley from the door.

But Helga and he must have food for their journey. If the Chink made a move, Swede was prepared to ship out his gun, and bind and gag Charley, under threat of death.

The intruder knew exactly where the compressed rations were kept, having often helped Charley in the kitchen. So he quickly filled both knapsacks. But to do so, it was necessary for him to turn his back on the Chinaman.

The moment his back was turned, the slit-eyes of the Oriental opened slightly and took in the scene without the slightest change in expression or any bodily movement.

Some sixth sense must have warned Swede that he was observed, for suddenly he wheeled around from his work, snatching out his automatic as he turned. But some sixth sense must have warned Charley Loy, too, for Swede saw merely the placid benign face of a sleeping Chinaman.

Charley made no further move, and Swede at last departed with both his packs well-filled with provisions, and rejoined Helga on deck. Not a soul stirred as, Swede helping Helga, because of the manacled condition of her hands, they made their way ashore, and to a protecting fringe of trees. As the fugitives disappeared, two slant eyes in a yellow face watched them from one of the portholes of the Miami. And then, if any one could have looked at that moment into the ship's kitchen, they would have seen a surprising sight. They would have seen Charley Loy doing a double shuffle dance, with glee writ large on his usually inscrutable face. But, luckily for his reputation as an imperturbable Oriental, no one saw him, for all others on the Miami were sound asleep. Then Charley returned to his chair, refolded his hands across his chest, and resumed his interrupted nap.

SWEDE and Helga, having gained the cover of the trees, were proceeding northward along the shore at a rapid pace.

As soon as they had gone about a mile, and thus were presumably out of hearing of the Miami, Swede got two large stones from the beach, and bashed the handcuffs between them, until he had freed his companion. Thus ended the eventful career of Mike Murphy's police manacles.

Although the two fugitives were due to have slept at the very time they started forth yet, tired as they were, they did not dare stop until they had struggled on for about eight hours, under the beating central sun. Then they slept, but whether for a few minutes, or a few hours, or a few days, there was no way of telling. The scene and the time of day on which they reopened their eyes were exactly the same as those on which they had closed them.

They had camped beside a little stream, which flowed tinkling to the sea. Now they roused themselves, washed, ate, and hurried on.

A hundred yards or so beyond the brook, the shore made a decided bend inland, so Swede parted the fringe of bushes to get the lay of the land. He found that they were at the tip of the first of two capes which bounded a har-

bor about a mile long and half a mile across at the mouth.

The opposite shore was devoid of trees, and there he saw what startled, but did not surprise him—a body of about a hundred and fifty Skraelings on the march south. Hastily withdrawing his head, he informed Helga that Altoonah's newly-formed rifle corps were about to arrive on the scene, on their way to rejoin the Miami.

Being a city man, he had no plans. There were here no alleys, down which to duck; no vacant lots to cross; no cellars, in which to hide.

Finally Helga suggested, "Let's hurry back to the little brook, and then go inland in the shelter of the trees and bushes of its ravine."

The idea seemed a good one, so they hastened to put it into execution. Fortunately their progress was assisted by a well-marked animal-trail which paralleled the stream.

As the path ascended, they more and more often caught glimpses of the enemy, until it became evident that, if they went much farther, they would by the same token be in more and more frequent danger of being seen themselves. Besides they were breathless from the speed with which they had made the ascent. So they sat down in the concealment of some bushes, to watch until the enemy should have passed by.

Now the two fugitives saw the Miami steam into sight from the southward. It anchored at the mouth of the little brook at whose headwaters Helga and her Swedish protector were hiding, and Fratelli made contact with his Skraeling rifle company. Nick had reasoned, as Helga had expected, that the fugitives had headed south. But she had not foreseen that he would do what he did—steam south, land a search party to work northward and thus head them off, while he sailed the yacht back to meet his rifle corps.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SHIP OF DEATH.

SWEDE and Helga, from their hiding-place two miles inland, saw the Miami meet the Skraelings, and presently they saw the natives advancing single file up the path by which they themselves had ascended.

"I forgot to ask you," remarked Swede, "Can you shoot a—?" He fumbled for the Norse word.

"Rifle," she added in English.

"How do you know?" he asked, surprised.

"Why, that's what my Eric calls them," said she in Norse. "Yes, I can. He has had me practice with it empty, many times. But only twice or thrice with 'bullets' in it, for we are very short of 'ammunition'."

"Well, now's your chance for some real practice," he announced, "for we have plenty of ammunition, and here come the Skraelings."

"Let's lie low and keep very quiet, until they get close," she cautioned.

So they waited. On came the leader of the single-file line of savages. On he came until, within about fifty yards of them, he suddenly stopped, uttered some sort of guttural remark of surprise, and pointed in their direction.

"He says 'Look!'" translated Helga in a whisper. "He must see us. No, don't fire, for he is pointing above us, at something else."

Swede and Helga turned their heads, and followed the direction of the pointing finger of the Skraeling. To their horror, they saw a gigantic gray snake, with curious markings, as big around

as a barrel, and fully fifty feet long, wriggling down the mountainside above them. His forked red tongue, large as an average snake of the outer world, quivered in and out of his half-open mouth, and his expressionless eyes were deadly cold.

To stay where they were would mean to be devoured by this serpent, whereas either to fire at the beast or to flee from it would mean to be immediately attacked by the Skraelings.

But the enemy were evidently as frightened of the snake as they. A hurried command was passed down the advancing line, and the savages precipitately left the bed of the stream and started southward, deployed like a line of skirmishers.

The two fugitives, for their part, lost no time in scrambling to the top of the north bank of the stream under cover of the bushes which lined it. There they paused, not daring to proceed further, but ready to flee into the open if the serpent should force them to.

But the snake, disregarding both them and the Skraelings, crawled leisurely down the ravine toward the sea.

"Looks as though they were planning to attack some one," said Swede, glancing back toward the skirmish-line of Skraelings, and avoiding all further mention of the big snake.

"I think they are searching for us," replied Helga.

The two watched and waited, until the thin strung-out line disappeared in the distance. They saw the Miami also go south again. Then they started sneaking diagonally across country in the opposite direction, until they struck the head of the bay, from which point they followed the shore northward as before.

"Nothing ahead of us now," exulted Swede, "until we strike Altoonah's main army falling back this way before the advance of your Vikings."

"Halt!" a voice hailed them in English. "Stick up your hands!"

ALTHOUGH Swede could see no one, it was evident that the speaker had him covered. It would be foolhardy to reach for his gat now. If the newcomer proved to be unarmed, or insufficiently armed, there would be plenty of time later to attempt gunplay. So up went Swede's hands.

"Put your hands up," he translated to the girl, "or some one is going to shoot you."

"Capture is worse than death," she replied contemptuously, and drew her automatic.

A figure in the much-bedraggled remains of a yachting costume, stepped from behind a bush in front of them, an automatic in his hand.

"Yimmy's ghost!" exclaimed Swede, in a horror-stricken voice.

"Shall I shoot him?" asked Helga.

"It wouldn't do any good," replied her escort, through chattering teeth, "for he's dead already. I killed him myself two or three days ago."

"Cut out the Svenska," interjected Scarface peremptorily. "Talk United States, or I'll drill you. I'm not afraid of the lady, for I can tell by the way she holds her gat that she hasn't thrown the safety catch. See!"

And, still keeping Swede covered, he stepped quickly over to Helga and relieved her of the firearm which she was frantically trying to discharge at him.

She promptly sank to the ground and began to sob.

Scarface then helped himself to Swede's gun and both rifles.

"Now you can lower your hands," announced he, "for you look tired. Sit down and tell me who the lady is, and what you are doing here, and where is the rest of your gang."

"You sure you ain't ban dead?" asked Swede incredulously.

"Listen, Swede—I ought to know, oughtn't I?"

"But ve shot you down in your glider and couldn't find you," Swede objected, still unwilling to trust the evidence of his senses.

One fundamental principle with Scarface Boston Jimmy was that he always retained control and direction of any dialogue in which he was engaged. So he ignored the question implied in the other's remark.

"Never mind how I got here," said he. "The fact is that here I am, and I have you covered; so it's you that's going to answer the questions, not I. Who is the lady? What are you doing here? And what has become of the rest of your gang?"

"Vell," replied Swede, still disconcerted, "her name ban Helga."

"Not Helga Uppri!" exclaimed Scarface.

Startled by the exclamation, the girl looked up.

"*Yah*, Helga Uppri," said she. "Helga Redmond."

"Ve ban run avay from Nick," added Swede. "Ve ban hunting for her Vikings."

"And where is Nick Fratelli now?"

"Yoost gone sout'."

"And the Miami?"

"Yoost gone sout', too. Nick ban in her."

"Fair enough!" ejaculated Jimmy. "So you've turned Viking? Well, so have I. Shake on it."

They shook. But, with Scandinavian persistency, Swede returned to his earlier doubt. "You ban dead, Yimmy?"

"I DON'T blame you for thinking so," replied Scarface tolerantly.

"You shot me down all right, but I wasn't hit, except one bullet which just barely nipped my side. Bled quite badly, but no real harm done. The other fellow was killed, and I couldn't control the plane, so it crashed. The plane caught me and carried me under, and stuck on the bottom. I guess I must have been stunned for a few moments.

"When I came to, I found that my head was inside the cockpit, which was upside down, and full of air. So I stayed there just as long as I could stand it, and then ducked out and came to the surface. The Miami was chugging away. I lay on my back with my nose just barely out of water until you were at a safe distance, then swam ashore and cut straight inland, meaning to turn northward after awhile and circle the Skraeling army.

"But this land must be narrower than I thought, for I soon struck the sea on the other side, and have been following the coast northward ever since. I hid while a body of Skraelings passed me just a little while ago, bound north."

"Nort'?" exclaimed Swede interrupting. "No, sout'!"

"What do you mean, south?" demanded Scarface. "If this is the opposite coast from the one we landed on, then that direction must be north."

"But it ban same coast," replied Swede, grinning. "You ban all twisted, Yimmy."

"Well, I must be!" ejaculated Scarface. "I'll bet I wandered around in a circle and came back to the same sea I started from. So that direction is

south. And the rest of Altoonah's army is fighting the Vikings somewhere north?"

"Yah."

"What became of Helga's boat and the Vikings who were with her?"

"Vikings all shot up vit machine gun. Ve took everyting out of the boat and left it," explained Swede.

During all this conversation, Helga had been studying the handsome, though scarred, face of the young gangster. Now she held out one hand to him with a gracious gesture.

Jimmy, not knowing just what was expected of him, dropped on one knee, took the hand in one of his, and kissed it. Whether or not it was what was expected, the action seemed to please the girl, for she smiled.

"Here are your guns," said Scarface. "Come on, let's trek north, and try to get through the Skraeling lines and join the Vikings."

"Boat!" exclaimed Helga, pointing out to sea.

Both men followed the direction of her finger. Far out at sea was a dragon-prowed ship, with sail furled, being propelled southward by lusty rowers, against a light head wind.

"The fools!" exclaimed Scarface Jimmy. "They can't stand up for a minute against a machine gun. We must head them off. Come on!"

WHEN Jimmy had failed to return to the plateau city, Angus Selkirk dispatched another glider, and not waiting for its report, at once set out down the Skraeling trail, with all the remaining available warriors of the plateau, leaving Nils Uppri, much against his will, in charge. Nils might be bishop, and hence the nominal ruler of all this realm, but his extreme youthfulness compelled him to defer to the judgment of his elders, even though he outranked them.

However, as soon as Angus had left, Nils asserted himself, and evolved what seemed to him, deprived of the advice of the one local man who understood Chicago gangsters and American firearms, to be a first-rate plan, namely, to sail south in a trading ship which had just arrived, and engage singlehanded in a naval battle with the Miami.

He could not conceive how a handful of these outlandish Americans, on whatever kind of a boat, with whatever kind of weapons, could be any match at all for one of the superb dragon ships of the Norsemen.

The Norse ship was fully manned, so the shortage of warriors on the plateau would not hamper him in his undertaking. There were plenty of old graybeards to assume the duties of government in the city which he was leaving. So he donned his armor, turned over the reins of government, and made for the beach. Several of the women and old men came down with him, to see him off.

Thus it was that his sister Astrid, his beautiful cousin Borghild, and the little Portuguese minx Theresa, were all on the beach when the final preparations were being made for sailing.

Not a word of Norse did little Terry understand, but when Borghild pointed south and said, "Yimmy. *Boat. Komm!*" she caught the idea, and nodded.

The group on the beach watched the stalwart craft row out to sea and turn southward. Bishop Nils Uppri, from the stern beside the helmsman, waved a proud farewell. His people waved back and cheered, for they loved the brave boy.

Then Astrid turned to look for Bor-

ghild and Theresa, but they were nowhere to be seen; inquiry of all those who had been on the beach produced no information, nor even any clews.

Meanwhile the Viking ship rowed south with furled sail, the crew taking turns at rowing and sleeping.

It was not until eight or ten hours later that one of the men, in disturbing one of the sleeping-mats, disturbed also Theresa and Borghild, whom the mat had served to conceal. The two were at once haled before the bishop, who gave them a quite unecclesiastical dressing-down.

But he was not as effective as he might have been. In the first place, he was too young. In the second place, Borghild was his cousin, who had grown up with him from childhood. And, in the third place, little Terry couldn't understand a word of his tirade.

"Gee, Your Reverence," said she, grinning, "that don't mean nothing in my young life. You'll have to speak United States, to get by with me. *Yee forstaar ikka.*"

Which was all the Norse she knew.

NILS didn't dare turn back, for fear that Angus might have returned to the plateau, and might put a stop to his venture. Nils, as boy bishop, presented somewhat the same pitiable figure as King George of England, begging his prime minister for permission to pardon Lord Mayor McSwiney, and being refused—perhaps the most pathetic occurrence in all the history of the outer world.

Accordingly there was nothing for Nils to do but put up with the presence of the two girls. Terry's presence, at least, did not particularly irk him. But he couldn't discriminate, before all these men, between her and his cousin.

In due course of time, the dragon ship of Nils Uppri passed the spot where the Viking army was slowly driving south the main body of the Skraelings; but Nils did not stop, or even draw near to the shore, for fear that older and wiser heads among the Norse warriors might attempt to dissuade him from his undertaking. And thus it was that eventually his barge hove in sight of Scarface, Swede and Helga, as already related.

The attempt of these three to head him off proved unavailing. They stood on the promontory and waved and waved and shouted, but the Viking barge swept on to the southward, the lusty song of the rowers drowning the warning voices.

The Miami was still in sight not far away, as it had slowed its engines to keep pace with the searching skirmish-line of savages. Presently the watchers on shore saw the Miami sight the Norse ship, turn around, and advance to meet it. They held their breaths with horror at the impending calamity.

Bravely the dragon ship steered straight at the Miami, to ram and sink it, the rowers speeding up to their fastest stroke. But expert as were these navigators out of the past, they were no match, in maneuvering, for a motor yacht, undermanned though it was.

So the Miami blithely side-stepped the charge; and, almost before the Vikings realized what was up, circled their ship with the deadly machine gun turned loose. In less than one ammunition-belt, it was all over. The once-proud Norse craft was drifting leaderless upon the sea. Nils Uppri had been one of the first to fall, and not another Viking stood alive on the dragon ship.

The watchers on the shore saw the Miami tie up alongside the barge for a few minutes, and then cut loose and

chug south again to rejoin the Skraelings. For Nick had made but a cursory search of the conquered boat, merely long enough to slit the throats of any wounded who showed signs of life, and to rob the dead of their jewelry and more ornate weapons and clothing. Of provisions he had no need, as he was fully stocked from the loot of Helga's ship. And he was not to be diverted, except temporarily, from his vengeful search for Swede and Helga.

Swede's defection had hampered him considerably, but he had stationed Cicero and Friday at the machine gun, and Charley Loy at the engines. The Chink might not know anything about machinery, but he could shift gears in response to bell-signals from the pilot-house, and could realize full well that any monkeying with the engines would mean his instant demise.

As the Miami proceeded south once more, the spoils of war were divided, and soon every one on board, even including Charley Loy, was busy accoutering himself in Norse clothing and armament. This preoccupation accounted for their not being quite as alert as they should have been, during the important events which immediately followed.

A SLIGHT shift in the wind slowly drifted the dragon ship shoreward.

"Let's meet her, when she beaches," suggested Helga, through Swede as an interpreter. "There may still be some alive on board, who may need our aid."

Jimmy assented, and so the three walked slowly along, still keeping under cover of the bushes, until they came to the spot toward which the boat was being borne by the rapidly freshening wind.

When it finally bumped upon the shallows, the three waded furtively out and climbed on board.

The mutilated and stripped bodies were a sad sight even to the two hardened Chicago gangsters. But to Helga they were more. Many of them were old friends and acquaintances. All were quite, quite dead, thanks either to American machine gun bullets, or to the frightful efficiency of the throat-slashing savages.

Under directions from the saddened princess, the two men carried the bodies, one by one, to the stern and covered each with a sleeping-mat.

The sight sobered Scarface Boston Jimmy, as the realization swept over him that *this was exactly what he himself had planned to do.* If it had not been for the defection of his chief lieutenant, Nick the Rat, this crime might now be on his own head. The real change in Scarface Boston Jimmy, and the definite abandonment of his dreams of empire, dated from that moment—and was strengthened by his relief and joy when Theresa and Borghild, unscathed, were found cowering beneath the pile of sleeping-mats. It was a heart-warming sight, that reunion of old friends.

Borghild flung herself upon Scarface, and clung to him, sobbing, "Yimmy, Yimmy."

Helga raised her eyebrows for a moment, and then smiled, tolerantly. Then, because of Borghild's preoccupation, Swede introduced Terry to Helga.

But suddenly Borghild broke away with a cry, "Nils, Nils, my cousin Nils. Where is he?"

"Nils? Was he on board?" exclaimed Helga and Scarface simultaneously, though in different languages.

"Sure," and "*Yah,*" replied Terry and Borghild.

And immediately there began a fran-

tic search among such corpses as had not yet been moved. The body of the boy bishop was soon discovered, lying in the bow where he had stood, with a party of boarders, directing the attack. The three women flung themselves upon it in tears.

But Scarface shouted, "Lay off it! He may still be alive."

ELBOWING the frantic women one side, he examined the body. The throat had not been slit. No wounds noticeable anywhere except one in the temple which smeared the face with blood.

Lifting the shirt of chain-mail, the gangster applied his ear to the chest.

"He's not dead!" he shouted. "Water! Quick!"

Theresa brought some at once in one of the cooking utensils and dashed it in Nils's face, and soon the blue eyes of the young Viking opened, stared vaguely around, rested on the girl bending over him, and paused there.

"Where am I?" Nils groaned.

"We must get him ashore at once to safety," asserted Scarface.

But, while they had been at work, the wind had made a complete about-turn, and they were now a hundred yards or more at sea and being rapidly blown further.

"Let's get up the sail and tack back," suggested Jimmy. "Hey, Swede, ask Mrs. Redmond and Miss Hoglund if they know how to hoist it, and then you help them. Miss Ferreira, you stay with the bishop. I'll clear away the broken oars, and then steer. Hurry!"

It was a rash and mistaken move. The Viking ship, in its apparently unmanned condition, might have drifted out to sea unnoticed; but the moment the gaudily striped sail began to rise, their maneuver was instantly sighted by the distant Miami, which at once put about, and came after them, full speed.

No time now to tack.

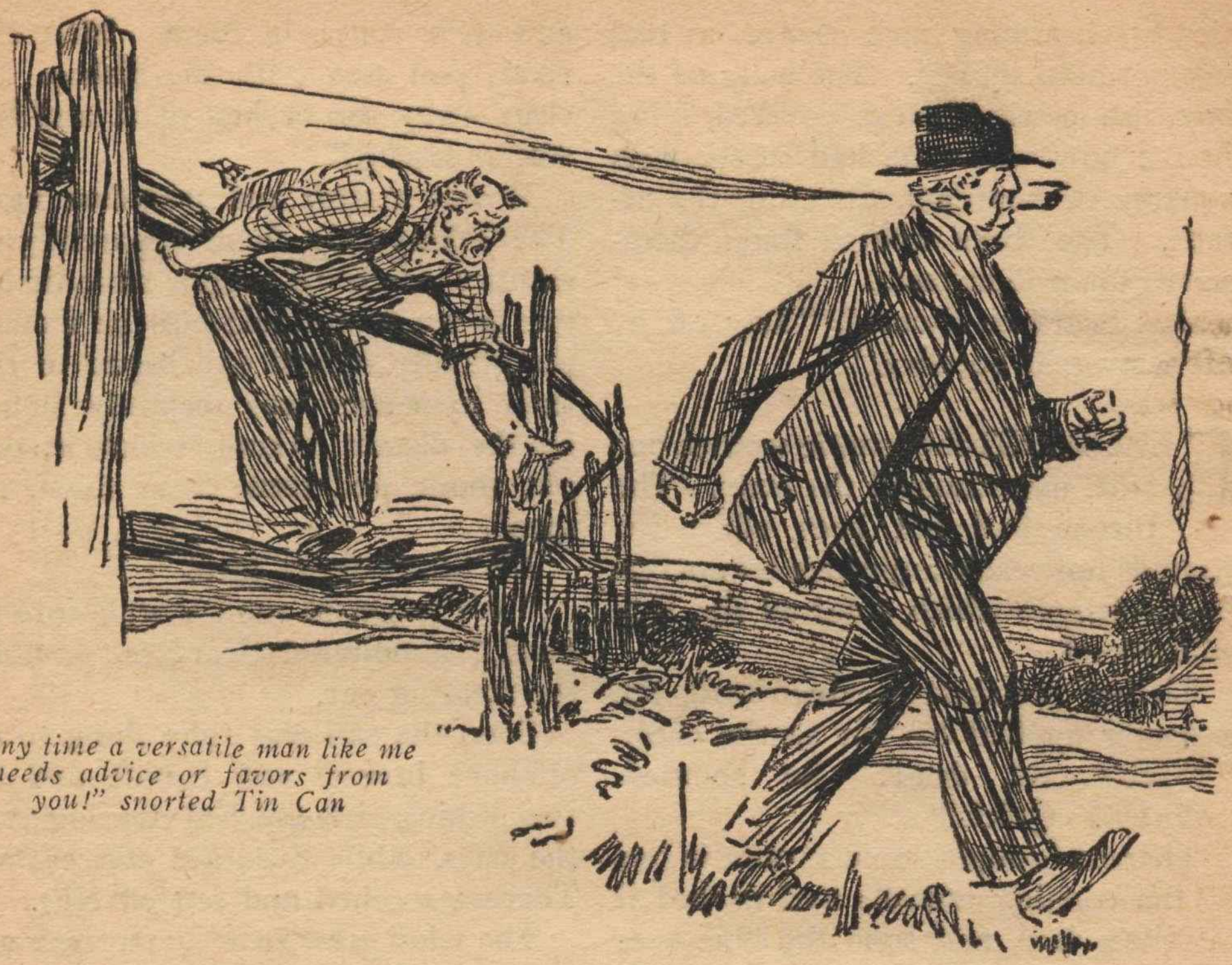
"We've got to run for it, before the wind," announced Scarface, grabbing the steering oar.

Soon the sail was fully flung to the offshore breeze, and Swede and the two Viking girls finished clearing away the oars, while Scarface steered, and Theresa soothed and tended Nils.

The wind grew steadily stronger and swung to the northward. Its strengthening brought the speed of the dragon ship almost up to that of the craft which was seeking to overhaul it. But the shift of wind to the northward enabled the Miami to follow in a smaller circle, and thus to overtake it with great rapidity.

As the Miami came within rifle range, those aboard the Viking barge could see Cicero and Friday busily getting the bow machine gun ready for action. In a few minutes its deadly spray would be spattering upon the fleeing vessel.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



"Any time a versatile man like me needs advice or favors from you!" snorted Tin Can

Canny

"Tin Can" McCann was only one man against the relentless march of progress; but, as he warned the Puget Sound surveyors and road-builders, he was versatile

By LAWRENCE WILLIAM PEDROSE

"TIN CAN" McCANN drove his skiff in to the shore with long, quick sweeps of the oars that revealed great agitation. The tide was high. He beached the light craft, dragged it up into the bushes, and, after stowing away in the stern sheets a neatly wrapped package for his neighbor, Timothy Bowers, took his own sack of groceries and struck off up the wooded trail toward home.

McCann and Bowers lived on adjoining homesteads, half a mile back from tidewater on Puget Sound. For twenty-nine years the old fellows had been friends. Now they were enemies. And the trouble had developed from a trivial bit of innocent raillery. Timothy was proud of his ability as a gardener, and raised his own vegetables; McCann preferred to buy what he needed. McCann had announced he was thinking of enlarging his cabin.

"Gwan," Timothy had scoffed. "All you need is room for a bunk and a can opener! They ought to call you 'Tin Can' McCann."

It was so true that the name had stuck, to McCann's discomfort. For twelve months now the old men had

not spoken to each other except on rare occasions, and they avoided meeting. Only one bond appeared to remain of their once beautiful friendship. That was the skiff. McCann went to the hamlet of Kingston, five miles distant, every Saturday morning. If Timothy needed anything from the store, he left a note in the boat, and his neighbor would bring the articles from town and stow them in the skiff, where Timothy could get them at his convenience —and without conversation.

SO McCann reached home, a cabin set at the edge of a small clearing in the timber. After putting away his groceries, he sat down on the front step of the dwelling and stared with conflicting emotions in the direction of Timothy's place.

At the store he had been advised of a matter of great importance. A State highway was projected, connecting the town with the county seat. The route followed that of an old State road which had been built to the edge of McCann's homestead on the south, and to the township line on the north edge of Bowers's land. The two men's quarter-sections constituted a mile gap in the old State road, and had to be crossed to connect the highways. A legislative appropriation having been made, a strip of their lands was to be taken.

McCann carried an unopened letter in his pocket, and its arrival just when the road was projected made him sure it had a bearing on the matter. In the package which he had left at the skiff was a similar missive which the postman had given him for Bowers. He wanted to go over to Tim's and discuss the thing which menaced the virgin wilderness in which they dwelled. But pride forbade.

True, he might go halfway and attract Bowers with a yell, so they could meet on the line dividing their properties—but to set foot upon his neighbor's place would be compromising.

The problem was solved by a hail which came from the edge of the woods in the direction of the beach trail. He turned with a quick frown, to discover Bowers perched on the fence, summoning him with a peremptory gesture. McCann got up with a shrug and strode leisurely toward his neighbor.

"What you doin' on my place, Tim?" he demanded. "I told you to keep your blattin' sheep off my land, and I don't make no distinction between sheep and sheepmen. Any one who'd bring bangtail muttons into a grazin' country and spoil the pasture for cattle is my idea of a hooman gnat, mentally and morally. And furthermore—"

"Oh, dry up!" interjected Bowers. "Your cow broke down my fences. Your horses trampled my berries. But I didn't come packin' a fight. Though I ain't totin' a branch either. I got a letter from the board of county commissioners saying they want to put a connecting link to their roads across my place. That's a fifty-foot strip for half a mile. They want to take three acres, more or less, and offer three hundred dollars. Otherwise they'll condemn the land and I'll probably get around a hundred dollars."

"Well," glared McCann, "I got one of them letters too. What you goin' to do about it?"

"What you going to do?" countered Bowers. "The land's worth more'n that. And if improvements come in, the taxes will go sky-high."

"I'm ag'in' it," declared McCann emphatically. "You know how those

things work out. Soon as the highway goes through, along will come toorists, then j'ints sellin' sody pop, gas stations, chicken dinner inns and road houses. Next year we'll have picnickers scattering trash all over the place and carryin' on like hellions in the woods!"

"But it would provide us with a good market for poultry and garden truck," argued Bowers. "And we can't expect to live in seclusion here all our lives. The world is growing. They say autymobiles have become thicker 'n horses, and the people have to have room to exercise them. They can't find space for 'em all in the city, so they're opening up the country. Maybe this district will settle up and we can establish a town site or something that 'd bring us in lots of money."

"Hrrumph!" growled McCann. "I'm no miser. I'm not lookin' for to make money. I got comfort and a good livin'. My neighbors"—this was a barbed dig—"leave me alone, mostly. Let them road builders cut your land into forty slices, if you want to. But they're not goin' to devastate mine!"

"I THINK I'll take them up," concluded Bowers. "But I thought I'd let you know. If we don't give them the right of way, they'll condemn it and take it anyway."

"They won't take mine!" flared McCann. "I settled on this land, and it's mine by thirty years' right. This is my home, and my home is my castle. I'll defend it with every ounce of my strength and every drop of my blood."

Bowers eyed the other anxiously.

"You—you wouldn't get vi'lent?" he protested. "You know, they'll go about it legally. The engineers will survey it, then the court will condemn it and serve notice on you. The road builders will come right along, and if you oppose them with vi'lence, they'll have you arrested and taken to the county jail. By the time you get out, the road 'll be built."

A crafty grin appeared on Tin Can McCann's face.

"I'm versatile," he said slyly. "I ain't been buckin' the world for sixty years for nothin'. Maybe I don't know law, but I do know hooman nature. If they'd make a decent price for the land —say a thousand dollars for the three acres—I'd give it to 'em and welcome. Then I could go away where pestiferous neighbors and smart lawyers wouldn't bother me."

"But you won't use vi'lence?" pursued Bowers, greatly disturbed.

McCann shook his head.

"No; I'm versatile, I tell you. But take my word for it—they won't cut up my land unless I get my price!"

"You'll never get it," sighed Bowers. "You may think you're canny, but them slick city fellers will outsmart you. And remember—if you get took to jail, don't come whinin' for me to bail you out!"

He swung to the ground and strode away.

"Say," McCann called angrily after him, "any time I want advice or favors from you, I'll send you a hand-engraved invitation! And when I get my price for my land, don't come achin' around, sayin' you wish you'd had spunk enough to demand your rights!"

IT came to pass as Bowers had predicted. Less than a fortnight after the county officials made their first overtures, a gang of surveyors was put to work running a line across Bowers's quarter-section, and thence across Tin Can's land. The engineers met their

first obstacle when they reached the old blaze line separating the two men's homesteads. Tin Can had made a special trip to Kingston. The storekeeper there had a knack for lettering, and Tin Can had him make up several signs. They read:

Danger—Bear Traps!

But it wasn't bear traps that Tin Can bought. He didn't have the heart to do that yet. He purchased a dozen single-spring affairs about the size of his hand—Number Ones—and toted them home with the signs.

He placed the warnings at strategical points, and waited to see the effect. The engineers came to the first sign, and were worried. Several days were lost before the deception was revealed. They had been going forward with extreme caution, and it was not until two of the chain men had gotten their toes pinched in the miniature traps that they came to understand the degree of danger they were facing.

McCann was undaunted. He had hardly hoped the surveyors would be permanently held up by muskrat traps. He went to town again, and this time he bought real bear traps. He got six of them, and they were big brutes. The engineers decided he meant business when they saw him toting them through the woods.

"Hey, old man," called the head engineer, running after him, "you can't get away with that! You're endangering my men when you stick those things around promiscuously. Besides, this isn't bear country!"

"The tarnation it ain't!" retorted McCann. "Wait till I catch a few and show you. I didn't give you fellers permission to trespass on my property, and if you value your hides, you'll get out of here!"

"But this right of way is to be condemned," protested the engineer. "As soon as I send in my figures on timber, and so forth, the court will give you a satisfactory price for the land. Come on—be a good fellow and don't hold us up with any more of these ludicrous stunts!"

"How much do you think I'll get for the land, timber and all?" parried McCann.

"Oh, about ten dollars an acre for the land, and about fifty dollars for the timber," smiled the engineer. "You're lucky to get anything."

"Humph!" snorted Tin Can. "This land's worth a hundred an acre, and the timber's worth two hundred. One thousand dollars is my price. Now—cl'ar out!"

The engineers were at their wits' end. They decided to match cunning with cunning, and sent forward their best woodsmen to watch where the old man put his traps. Tin Can made a bold set just before dusk, then left the trap, circled through the woods, and came back to watch it from the concealment of a patch of huckleberry bushes. He saw the enemy steal out of the brush, uncover the trap and, chortling with glee, carry it away.

At dawn the following morning he went to the engineers' camp, which was located on Bowers's quarter-section. Routing out the head man, he told him he had set out quite a large number of bear traps. The engineer was exasperated and argued with him.

"I'm just givin' you fair warnin'," growled Tin Can. "I let you think you outfoxed me when you lifted that first trap. But I've got lots more, and they're scattered cl'ar across my place. I'm after bear, and I don't want you fellers traipsin' through the woods. They're big ones, too, them traps.

They'd bite off a man's leg as quick as a buzz saw. So stay cl'ar!"

HE trudged back home and went to bed. Later in the day he was disturbed by some one pounding upon his cabin door. He got up and found Timothy Bowers, puffing from excitement and exertion, standing on the threshold.

"Get out!" McCann shrilled. "You've lined up with the enemy, and you're takin' your miserable life in your hands, comin' here. I warn you! I got bear traps scattered everywhere, and if you or those blattin', bangtail sheep of yourn get into them, I won't be responsible!"

"Oh, look here, Tin Can," begged Bowers. "You didn't set any traps for me, and I know it. I've come to speak for the engineers. They're nice boys. At best, you can only hold them up for a while. Be reasonable. Let that road go through, and I'll assign to you what I get out of the condemnation."

"You renegade!" scorned McCann. "You go over to the enemy camp and still expect me to have truck with you? Didn't I tell you that when I wanted your advice I'd send you a hand-engraved invitation? Them city guys has my proposition, and when they come to me with the cold cash, I'll dig up them traps—not before. Now go!"

Bowers went, defeated and angry.

Again there was a period of stalemate. The engineers went out with their rods and began exploring with minute care every inch of the way as they advanced upon Tin Can's soil. In three days they had progressed only a quarter of the way across the forbidden land.

They found no traps. But there was no way of determining how many had been set out or where they might be. Others might be scattered about in the woods to catch the men if they stepped off the right of way. So great was the danger, it began to affect the morale of the gang. The men became furtive, fearful that at any moment they might plunge into one of the terrible snares.

And there was nothing to prevent Tin Can from sneaking in and putting other traps in the area that had been explored and declared safe. It was only when some of the men quit flatly that the engineers put their inventive genius to work.

One Saturday morning Tin Can made his customary trip to Kingston, and found on the dock there two strange steel monsters which the steamer from the city had just unloaded. While he hung around, two of the men from the surveyors' camp arrived and took charge of the contraptions. The men climbed aboard them, and they went *chug-chugging* up the dock and lumbered off into the woods.

"Tractors," explained the storekeeper. "Caterpillar tractors. Burke, the engineer, says he's got you buffaloed now, Tin Can. You can't trap one of those things. Sorry you're beaten, old boy. I didn't want that road to go through any more'n you did—it 'd take all my trade to the county seat."

"Beaten, am I?" snapped McCann. "Why, I ain't started to fight yet! That road 'll go through when I get my price—not before. Let them run their lines. You wait till they start gradin'! And see here, don't you go callin' me Tin Can, either."

"You—you won't use firearms?" questioned the store man nervously. "They're just laying for you to do something rash, so they can slap you in jail!"

Tin Can laughed grimly. "No. I only put up the obstacles I have a right to, on my land. But I'm versatile, I am."

"But after that strip is condemned," warned the storekeeper, "you'll be the one who's trespassing on it, and anything you do then, they'll hold you liable."

"When that time comes, they'll be hog-tied," grinned McCann. "Now, I've got an order I want you to put through Monday for me, and I'll be over next day to meet the boat from town."

He gave the store man certain instructions, took his usual stock of groceries, including a small order for Bowers, and went jauntily back to his boat and rowed home.

McCANN watched with more than a little secret satisfaction the triumphant invasion of his land by the surveying gang. The alien crew *chugged* back and forth on their caterpillars in total disregard of any traps he might have set, churning up the soil and grinding everything in the way deep into the ground. The men taunted him when they saw him near the right of way, but he took their gibes good-naturedly.

"We'll see who laughs last!" he retorted, when the chief of the gang called to him and asked him if he had anything more in his bag of tricks.

Tuesday he again rowed to Kingston, and returned with ten wooden cases. Each was stamped:

Stumping Powder
40% Dynamite
Handle with Care

So that the prematurely exulting surveyors would not learn of his plans, he waited until darkness fell before he began carrying his cargo home. He had plenty of time, and went about the task leisurely. The first night he took two boxes home. The following two nights he carried home four boxes each night. Then he set about perfecting the next step in his program.

Behind the cabin lay a pile of tin cans—the containers which Timothy Bowers had pointed to with ridicule. He selected two that were in good condition. Then he went out into the woods and cut several small saplings, which he peeled with his jackknife. With care he removed the stumping powder from the boxes. He handled them fondly, and there was a reminiscent smile on his face. Once, many years ago, he had worked in the mining camps.

"When it comes to powder, Tin Can knows his stuff," Timothy Bowers had often said.

The waxed brown paper covering the sticks of powder was dry, so he took about thirty sticks into the house and set them alongside the stove. In half an hour the waxed paper became streaked with oil, telling that the powder had "thawed" and reached its most combustible stage.

Satisfied, he carried the sticks outside again and fitted them into one of the tins. Next he opened the ends of several sticks, drilled holes with a sharpened piece of wood, and fitted them with detonation caps and fuse. Then he carelessly folded down the top of the tin. The second tin was even harder to fix.

The day was over by the time the job was completed. But he was in no haste. The surveyors, knowing nothing of his trump card, had finished running their lines for the day and departed. The following night he scout-

ed the length of the survey without finding a single man on guard. Relieved, he got a shovel and his two infernal machines and went back.

One of the tins he buried in the right of way. The other he placed on a stump in a conspicuous position not far from the old blaze dividing his and Bowers's homesteads. He stuck the shovel in the ground with artful carelessness, then went home and got the powder boxes. These he took apart, separating sides from ends, and laid them in places along the right of way where they could be instantly seen. To an observer it would appear that dozens of boxes of explosives had been relieved of their contents in the vicinity of the right of way. It required no stretch of the imagination to guess where the powder had been hidden.

TWO days passed. Then a crew of men came through and put up condemnation notices. McCann received an official-looking letter through the mail. It was Greek to him; he could not read.

He concluded, after a brisk stranger had dashed up and, asking if he were Mr. McCann, handed him a formal-looking document, that ownership of the right of way had virtually passed to the hands of the enemy. He chuckled to himself. Then one morning a small army of men appeared with motor-driven machinery, coming from the direction of Bowers's place. The woods became filled with noise. He knew that the road builders, to speed up their work, were about to attack the right of way at several different points. But the gang had no more than brought up their machinery than two excited young engineers came dashing up to the house.

"Hey," one of them demanded, "what's the meaning of all those dynamite boxes lying along the right of way?"

"Nothin'," drawled McCann. "Just overlooked 'em, I guess. I'm careless thataway."

The man thrust an accusing finger at him and held up the tin filled with thawed powder.

"What does this bomb mean?" gritted the engineer.

"What would you guess?" countered McCann.

"Do you know what 'll happen to you if you've mined that right of way?" threatened the other. "That's a State road now!"

"Wasn't when I was down there last with that dynamite," smiled McCann, unperturbed. "I did considerable work, preparing to break up the subsoil. I just happened to get my shots placed when that strip was taken away from me. Now you fellers can finish it."

"But we don't know where you placed the mines!" exclaimed the road builder angrily.

"Well, go ahead and put your graders to work—you'll know soon enough," invited Tin Can.

The engineers were horrified.

"Why," exclaimed the one holding the bomb, "this stuff has been thawed and is in a highly explosive condition. If a shovel or a scraper-point hit it, the whole outfit would be blown to bits!"

"You never spoke a truer word, son," agreed McCann. "But you would condemn my land without playing fair with me. Now you boys can run along and play with your fireworks. They know at headquarters where I stand. Just to show you I bear you boys no ill will, I'll furnish a nice grassy plot and a headboard for every one who finds one of those cans!"

The men went away, distinctly not comforted or relieved. The construction gang did no work that day. The right of way was minutely—and very cautiously — examined, but Tin Can had done his work well. An Indian couldn't have solved his woodcraft.

A week sped swiftly. There were numerous callers who came to the cabin, but McCann refused to admit them. He would merely make sure that the visitor was from the road-building gang, then mutter some excuse and close the door. Then one afternoon a portly, middle-aged man of really important bearing paid a call.

"I'm the contractor on this highway project," said the visitor brusquely. "Now, McCann, I've had enough of your foolishness. You either show me where those mines are—every last one of them—or I'll have the sheriff pick you up!"

"*Then*—how would you find the——er—things that's holdin' up your job?" grinned McCann.

The visitor fumed. He threatened dire things. Then he tried cajolery. The landowner was not susceptible.

Finally the contractor calmed down. "What 'll you take to remove those infernal machines?" he asked, drawing a thick roll of currency from his pocket. "I'll give you a hundred dollars."

"Not interested," returned McCann shortly. "I put a price of a thousand dollars on that strip of land. I'm the owner, and I'm the one to put the price on it."

THE visitor knew he was beaten. He ground his teeth savagely and counted out the amount asked.

"Lucky for you I'm cleaning up a chunk on this State job, or I'd see you in jail first!" he grumbled. "Here's your money—now show me where those mines are."

McCann took the money out to the barn and concealed it. Then he led the way down to the right of way and along it to the point where the survey line entered his property. He walked confidently to a small knoll, turned, got his bearings by squinting between the trees, and marked the ground with his heel.

"Here's one," he said. "Dig!"

"Get a shovel," ordered the contractor in a tone of authority to which he was accustomed. "When you old scissor-bills get on my jobs, you have to work!"

"I agreed to show you where they were—not to play badger," McCann drawled.

The contractor swore beneath his breath and called to a laborer. McCann stood by with folded arms while the mucker dug carefully down until he had uncovered the tin planted there. McCann gestured to the contractor.

"Fetch it up," he said impatiently.

The contractor glanced at him sharply, almost with suspicion, then knelt and picked up the tin. McCann took it from him and pried up the cover with his jackknife. Then, with a wide grin, he extended it at arm's length. The contractor looked—and dived into it with his hand.

Instead of being packed with high-test stumping powder, the tin proved to contain row beside row of short lengths of peeled saplings.

McCann turned away, shaking with mirth.

"Say," he called over his shoulder, "would you mind telling that neighbor of mine, on your way out, that old 'Tin Can' is a versatile fellow? He's kind of skeptical on that point!"

THE END.

In frantic rage the Russian struck Halsey

John Solomon's Biggest Game

Strangest of all Europe's intrigues was the empire-shaking duel that made Paris's underworld a place of peril for Jimmy Warden

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Cyrano," "The Mysterious John Solomon," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

SIGNOR DOMINETTI, unscrupulous guiding genius of a vast organization of international crooks, has clashed many times with the mysterious cockney, John Solomon, whose power and organization are equally secret and incalculable.

But now Dominetti has struck, bombing and sniping Solomon's headquarters in all Europe's capitals, and killing his agents in various "accidents." Solomon marshals his forces against Dominetti's plot to place the sinister Grand Duke Basil on the Russian throne. The cockney induces Fascist Italy to back another claimant to the throne, Sergei Romanoff.

June Tully, *en route* to Solomon's headquarters in Paris with the formula of a mysterious destructive ray, is kidnaped by Frank Halsey, a Dominetti agent, but gives a copy of the formula to James Warden, a young American ex-diplomat, who takes it to Solomon.

Later in the "Abode of Bad Spirits," an unsavory Parisian night club, War-

This story began in the Argosy for February 15.

den and another Solomon agent, North, outwit Halsey by switching to him a drugged *liqueur* intended for June Tully; and June escapes. The drug, a concentration of hashish, has the effect of destroying a person's ability to evade or lie to questioners. But Dominetti's men—the Russian Glazunoff and the Jap Matsura—gain their object; by capturing and torturing Solomon's chemist, Pearson, they discover the key word of the secret formula.

Meanwhile, Warden has penetrated Dominetti's Paris headquarters and obtained a copy of a hidden treaty between America and Great Britain which, if published, would plunge Europe into turmoil. He gives this document to June, with instructions to deliver it secretly to the American Embassy.

Later he is trapped by the treacherous Inspector Leblanc, of the *Sûreté,* on Dominetti's pay roll. While waiting for Dominetti he sees Solomon for a moment, in company with the "Scorpion," a Dominetti man whom Warden has bribed to take a note to North.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN IMPRISONED ENVOY.

NOON approached.

Since Solomon and his unsuspecting guide had departed, James Warden had been sitting there with no other companion than the brutish taxi driver, Emile—a man who talked not at all, grunted when addressed, and played interminable solitaire when he was not reading old newspapers.

The shock of seeing John Solomon here had at first inspired hope in Warden, but this gradually died away. Solomon had looked at him and departed without a word or gesture—probably no less astonished to see Warden sitting tied to the chair than was Warden to see him.

So this was the Scorpion's sucker "tourist!" Then, instead of being out of town, Solomon was hiding in some little *pension* near by. Why? And why had he engaged the Scorpion for three hours of aimless driving each morning?

"Ask me something easy, James," said Mr. Warden to himself. "Does John know that his Scorpion taxi driver is one of Dominetti's gang? Probably not—but he knows it now. As North says, there's no earthly use in trying to account for anything Solomon does, so we might as well give it up. And since he saw me here, he knows I made a mistake; and that probably settles my hash so far as he's concerned. He could send a couple of his Arabs to set me free, or tip off an agent of the *Sûreté*—but will he?"

As time drew on, it became sadly evident that Solomon had done and would do nothing of the sort. Surely the little cockney could not be actually in hiding! Yet so it seemed.

Noon arrived. The outer room was filled with men, workmen and chauffeurs. Steps sounded, and into the room came a gentleman who swung his stick indolently and eyed Warden with a fleeting smile. It was the man whom Warden had encountered in the lounge of the Savoy in London. Emile came to his feet.

"Good day, M. Glazunoff," he said. "Here is your friend, awaiting you."

Glazunoff nodded. "So I see. M. Warden, this is scarcely a good place for quiet conversation. I suggest that you give me your parole to come with me peaceably, and we shall then not have to use force."

"To the Boulogne Villa?" asked Warden.

"Exactly."

Warden gave his assent. He had, as a matter of fact, no choice in the affair; to refuse would only be to make his position worse. It was not difficult for him to understand June Tully's fear of this man before him—this pallid creature of unemotional mien and reptilian eyes. The suggestion of inhumanity about Glazunoff was a clear enough index to the man's cold cruelty.

"Loose him," Glazunoff said to Emile, and paid the latter his wage. "Then, while he comes out to the car with me, keep close with your gun. Shoot at his first move to get away."

WARDEN stood up and stretched leisurely as the ropes fell off. Except for his sore head, he had suffered no ill effects in body.

"Parole as far as the villa, then," he said cheerfully. "I hope you have a good luncheon awaiting me, Glazunoff. I'm hungry."

Glazunoff's thin lips twisted.

"Men don't complain of our hospitality," he said with dry significance. "A cigarette?"

"Thanks."

Warden walked out of the place at Glazunoff's side. Behind him came Emile. The big Mercedes was waiting in the street.

Solomon's startling arrival, the message to North—these things had given Warden more hope than he dared admit. Now, in the open, he sent sharp glances around. If some one were on watch, if they knew he was departing and could trail him to the villa, things were not, after all, so desperate! Yet his heart sank as he swept the vicinity. The two streets were empty. Not a soul was in sight.

"Fool!" he told himself as he got into the car at the bidding of Glazunoff. "Fool! Of course nothing's in sight. Would North be standing out on the street corner? If any one's on the watch they'd be under cover."

None the less, he knew he had made a mistake—and he knew Solomon's calm verdict on those who made mistakes. From this moment, he definitely abandoned hope, so far as any help from the outside was concerned.

Glazunoff sat beside him in silence as the big car whirled out to the Auteuil gate and along the wide avenue fringing the old moat. Emile had not accompanied them. The Russian was taking no chances—he kept his hand in his coat pocket, and watched Warden narrowly. The latter turned to him, as they came to the church and swung into Boulevard Jean Jaures.

"With whom am I dealing in this affair?" asked Warden casually. "With you, with Halsey, or with Dominetti?"

"Dominetti is in London," said Glazunoff. "Halsey is in bed—as you probably know. So it seems that you are dealing with me."

"Good!" Warden smiled, as he met the unwinking, cold eyes. "So Halsey's in bed, eh? He never knew I had switched the glasses on him, eh? He shouldn't make such mistakes."

Glazunoff made no response.

Two minutes later they turned into the open gates of the Dominetti villa, and the gates were swung shut as the car halted. The Russian touched Warden's arm.

"Let me warn you," he said quietly, "any false motions would be most unfortunate for you, M. Warden."

"Thank you," said the former diplomat. "I shall make none, I assure you."

He examined his surroundings with keen interest, as he alighted and followed Glazunoff into the house; the two men who had opened and closed the gates came close behind him.

The gardens were rather large—graveled paths, a fountain, fruit trees and a vegetable plot in the rear, the blank wall of a large apartment house closing in the opposite side. The house entrance was upon the gardens—a small postern gate in the wall gave access to the street. The house itself was large, of three stories.

AS he passed into the entrance hall, Warden noted the inner doors, the holes in floor and ceiling whence came steel rods into the doors when closed—like many such houses built after the communist troubles, the place was a regular fortress.

The hall went on to a large stairway. On the right was a small salon and a dining room. On the left were the kitchens and the library-conservatory, into which Glazunoff led the way. At a glance Warden took in the room and the glass flower-house beyond—the fine old furniture and portraits, the large flat desk with its modern appurtenances, and the massive black oak wall cupboard with its shelves of bottles and tobaccos.

Glazunoff gestured to the two men who had followed, and they remained at the door on guard. Russians, Warden thought. Going to the desk, Glazunoff seated himself, lighted a cigarette, and glanced over some papers before him.

"Make yourself at home, Mr. Warden," he said with dry irony. "It is a pleasure to deal with such a man as you. Here, I assure you, there need be no fear that the drinks or cigarettes are drugged. Be comfortable; when I have disposed of a few details, we shall take up your affair. Until then, we need not be unfriendly."

"Perhaps not even then," said Warden lightly. This shaft at a venture drew a sharp, swift glance from the Russian.

"No? Well, we shall see. Take the big chair there, help yourself to drinks or smokes, and pardon me if I neglect you for the moment. Ivan! Any report from M. Halsey?"

"Asleep, excellency," said one of the men at the door.

"The Arab who was brought here?"

"Has refused to talk, excellency."

The eyes of Glazunoff flashed with a singular light. A slight color came into his face, denoting inward passion, then died into a colder, more vivid pallor. As brown-skinned men turn black under stress of emotion, this man turned a more terrible white. He was on the point of giving some order when Warden, inexpressibly horrified by the revelations of this inhuman face, intervened in his quiet, cheerful fashion.

"Your pardon, Glazunoff—it's no use to torture the poor chap, you know. He'll not talk, and indeed knows little. Let me suggest an alternative. On what point do you wish to interrogate him?"

For an instant the piercing, snaky eyes bored into Warden.

"In regard to Mr. Solomon."

"Very well. Let's dispense with useless cruelty. I'll tell you what I know about this Solomon, if you'll pass up poor Ahmed."

Glazunoff nodded. "Very well."

Taking up his desk telephone, the Russian put in various calls, referring from time to time to the papers on his desk. Nearly all the conversation was in Russian, of which Warden knew not a word; a brief talk in Italian revealed nothing of the slightest interest.

Then came a call for Glazunoff. The Russian listened frowningly, and his eyes went to Warden, to whom he put a brief aside question.

"Do you know anything about a man, an American, named Red Farrow!"

Warden nodded. "At the *Sûreté*, I believe. At least, I handed him over to two agents last night. He carried a large quantity of snow."

Glazunoff flashed white teeth in a smile, spoke into the instrument, then laid it down, not on its rack, but on the desk. Rising, he went to the large oak cupboard, poured himself a drink and took it back to the desk. He sipped the drink and eyed Warden appraisingly.

"MY dear chap, you seem to have made yourself most obnoxious," Glazunoff said pleasantly. "I, for one, do not quite understand your connection with our business. Why, for example, did you send us word this morning that Miss Tully was in safety? Why did you so violently take her from the Savoy in London? If you are not an agent of the man Solomon, who are you?"

"So far as Miss Tully is concerned, I'm my own agent," said Warden. "I sent that message this morning so you'd know she had delivered her information and so you wouldn't issue further orders to murder her."

Glazunoff set his glass down suddenly. "Very well conceived! However, your solicitude was needless. We have no further interest in her—unless we except the personal interest of Mr. Halsey. He is, unfortunately, a stubborn gentleman where ladies are concerned, so I cannot answer for him. Was it on her account that you went to the Abode of Bad Spirits last night?"

Warden puffed at his cigarette.

"Partly, yes," he responded after a moment. "I understand that Halsey was Dominetti's chief agent here, and wanted to have a talk with him. Instead, I was attacked—therefore, I attacked in turn."

"And fell into a pit, eh?"

"So it seems." Warden helped himself to a Dubonnet and resumed his seat.

"Hm! I understand," said Glazunoff, "that you are not an agent of Solomon. Yet his men serve and aid you, and you use one of his cars. Suppose you make your position a trifle clearer, my friend."

"Gladly. I have been trying to find Miss Tully. Solomon offered his help. That is all."

"Oh! And this Solomon—where is he now?"

The American shrugged. "How should I know? He said he was going out of the city." As Warden spoke, it occurred to him that Solomon had probably expressed the exact truth—for Auteuil was a suburb, though in reality a part of Paris. "His house has been closed up, I can't reach him, and when he'll return I can't say."

"Your interest in things, then, has ended—now that Miss Tully is safe?"

"So far as she's concerned, yes."

"Let us see," resumed Glazunoff. "You obtained entrance to a certain room last night. You read a letter half written there. This morning you took certain action in regard to what you had learned. How do you justify this, Mr. Warden? It was not on Miss Tully's behalf that you met Leblanc, certainly."

"Not at all," agreed Warden cheerfully. He still had a card, a trump card, which might change the whole course of the game. "Leblanc was

ordered to remove a certain gentleman, who was a friend and supporter of Prince Sergei. Naturally, I had to intervene."

"Eh?" Glazunoff looked astonished. "I fail to see the connection. Do you know Sergei?"

Warden laughed. "Of course. How could I be representing him without knowing him?"

"You—representing him?" There was no doubt about the Russian's surprise. "This is most amazing, I must say. In what way do you represent him?"

"In regard to certain events which will transpire on the twenty-fifth—in three days," returned Warden calmly. He felt in his pocket and produced his letter of authorization. "Your men did not take my papers, fortunately. Here is a letter—my credentials."

BORIS GLAZUNOFF was stupefied for a moment, evidently. He took the letter, read it over, scrutinized the signature, then returned it.

"Nobody dreamed this," he said slowly, his gaze on Warden. "Sergei has refused to discuss affairs with any of us, has refused to consider any terms. Why, then, should he empower you to do so?"

"Ask him that, not me," said Warden. "Perhaps he thought that his affairs were in such bad shape I could not do them any harm. At all events, I'm authorized to discuss terms with you or with Dominetti—you understand, I can deal only with the head of affairs—and to report those terms to Sergei."

Glazunoff nodded, his eyes narrowed, reflective.

"Hm! Yes, he'd do it that way," he said, a trace of exultation in his voice. "Instead of coming here personally, he'd send you—and save his face. Well, this somewhat alters my intentions toward you, Mr. Warden. But—ah!" He glanced up, suddenly startled. "You spoke of the twenty-fifth—the day after to-morrow. To what do you refer?"

Jimmy Warden looked a trifle bored.

"Come, come, my dear Glazunoff—are we such children? Surely we can lay our cards on the table and play an open game. Both of us know exactly what is to transpire here on the twenty-fifth. Prince Sergei knows it. John Solomon knows it. I must say that your Signor Dominetti has hit some ruthless blows—to the best of my knowledge, he has practically wiped out Solomon's organization, whatever it was. Sergei doubtless knows this, also."

"Eh? And is ready to talk terms, is he?" Glazunoff's pallid features lighted up. "Come, he's showing sense. Just how far, Mr. Warden, are you acquainted with the negotiations now under way?"

Warden gave him a curious glance. Why was the man taking this tone?

"Do you prefer being a child, Glazunoff? Well, then, be a child. I know all about your negotiations and your plans—from your agreement with Baron Yamanaka to the treaty between Italy, Great Britain and the United States which you expect to publish. The question is whether you—or, rather, Signor Dominetti—think it worth while to deal with Prince Sergei through me, or not."

Somewhat to Warden's amazement, the Russian seemed nothing short of paralyzed by these words. Warden himself was playing the game, no more. He had no instructions from Solomon, and he had no actual right whatever to

conduct himself as an emissary of Prince Sergei—except in so far as it might save his life. In effect, he was acting absolutely in the dark.

AND now, suddenly, occurred a startling thing. There was no third party to the conversation; but, abruptly, a third voice spoke in the room—a voice which Warden recognized at once.

"Am I to understand, Mr. Warden, that Sergei is ready to treat with us?"

Warden started. Then, catching the peculiar half smile on the face of Glazunoff, he repressed his astonishment.

"I do not talk with persons I cannot see," he returned coldly.

"You are in no position to dictate," came the response, in the voice of Dominetti. "I am speaking from London. If it is worth while, I shall come over and see you personally. Is Sergei ready to treat with us?"

"Naturally, since I am authorized to discuss the situation with you."

"And where did you learn of the treaty you just mentioned?"

Warden smiled to himself. He had the whip-hand there.

"Must I repeat that I prefer to see with whom I speak?"

"Very well. Boris! Hold this man until I arrive to talk with him. Exert every effort to locate Solomon; inform me when you succeed. Matsura is coming over to-night with certain instructions; give him every coöperation. That is all."

"Very good," said Glazunoff, and put the telephone on its rack. He looked at Warden and waved his hand.

"I understand that our friend Solomon works miracles—well, we make use of science!" he observed placidly. "Hidden microphones, a connection with the London office, and it is very simple. Dominetti hears all that transpires in this room, when necessary."

Warden wondered what Boris would say did he actually know what sort of miracles John Solomon worked—but he did not voice his thoughts.

"Very well, then. And what about luncheon?" he asked. Glazunoff laughed a little and rose.

"Excellent! You consent to be our guest, then?"

"Naturally. My business lies with Dominetti."

"Understood. And when Sergei hears about his old friend and backer being killed, being caught as a forger of notes—what the devil! Why, the Prefecture will probably ask Sergei to leave the country, eh? He'll be only too anxious to come to terms with us. Yes, yes—very lucky thing you walked into that trap, my friend! So come, I'll take you to your room, and we'll lunch in half an hour."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE YELLOW STREAK.

THOSE who were in Paris last summer will recall the enormous tension which prevailed in political circles at the time, and the tremendous tide of anti-Italian feeling that swept over France.

The rise of the Fascist Italy had for some years been regarded askance, for now Italy threatened the dominance of France in European affairs; but with the various frontier incidents which had recently taken place, the supposed activity of Fascist plotters in Paris itself swept the French people into a frenzy.

A certain portion of the French press had for long been violently anti-

foreign—openly distrusting the United States, sneering at American tourists, demanding that Russian refugees leave France, and crying for the expulsion of Italian and other foreign workmen. The near-crisis provoked in the summer of 1929 by the low ebb of tourist money, in consequence of the taxes and petty annoyances visited upon tourists, had frightened all France into treating her visitors with more courtesy; but the rapid succession of outrages made her forget all more practical matters.

Then came the discovery of the English scientist, Pearson—the body found one morning in the Bois, a Fascist dagger pinning to its ribs the flaming words: "Death to all traitors and enemies of Fascism!" This aroused not only France, but England; Downing Street and the Quai d'Orsay sat upon the wires with stern messages. In vain did Rome deny all knowledge of the matter.

The laboratory where Pearson had been working was destroyed by an explosion and fire—and later, when the body of Pearson's assistant was recovered, bullets were found in it, and a pistol bearing the Fascist emblem was found in the ruins. The *Gaulois* and the *Quotidien* burst out next day with heated denunciations of Mussolini and Fascism, and half the French press followed suit.

All sorts of rumors ran riot—the King of Italy had fortified the Quirinal, the Crown Prince had been assassinated, Mussolini was concentrating an army on the French border, and so forth—all of them unfounded, but highly exciting to the French mind.

It was amid and because of these circumstances that the great Frenchman, Poincaré, issued what was undoubtedly the noblest document of modern history—his now famous "Appeal," which rang across the world within a few hours. Who does not remember those opening sentences of steel, those clanging words of sheer inspiration?

> Fellow citizens! France does not fall to the poniards of conspirators; the sword of our glorious republic is not unsheathed against vile rumor. Twelve years ago, Italy was fighting beside us. Let us remember the brotherhood of patriotism! A passionate love of country is the heritage of the ages. Because a child makes mistakes, shall the entire family be punished? No! Let us be passionate for the right, for justice, for tolerance—not for hatred and warfare and blind savagery!

This remarkable document, followed as it was by the astonishing "open letter" of another leader, Briand, held France stupefied, swaying in the balance, irresolute. And in the days of hesitation, of doubt, of conflicting emotion, the unseen drama that was to determine the fate of half Europe was being played to its finish in the walled villa of Boulogne, and in the rain-wet streets of Paris.

IN the affairs of men, the accidental ever plays a large, often a crucial, rôle. And in this drama Jimmy Warden was to take an ever-increasing part, to the surprise not only of others, but of himself as well.

He found his status between that of prisoner and of guest. The upper portion of the house, once composed of very large and luxurious bedrooms, had been cut up into a number of smaller but very comfortable rooms. While his window, which overlooked the garden, was not barred, his door was locked when he was in the room;

if the American wished to walk in the garden, it was free to him at all times. He took his meals with Glazunoff, catching no sight of Halsey until the following day at luncheon.

During this time Warden kept his eyes open, but learned little that was new. A good many men were in or about the house—two large, placid Russians who served Glazunoff, the others apparently all Italian. Then there was the smiling, spectacled little Jap, Matsura, who puzzled Warden. Walking in the garden after dinner, smoking, the American saw Matsura arrive, and as he came back into the house, Glazunoff called him into the library and introduced him to the Oriental.

"Mr. Matsura, this is Mr. Warden," said Boris in flawless English. "Mr. Warden is acting for Prince Sergei, as you may be aware, and until recently has been in the United States diplomatic corps. Matsura is a scientist, Warden—a real one."

The Jap bowed politely. "Of that," he said, "Mr. Glazunoff should be an excellent judge! I am most happy to meet you, Mr. Warden."

To tell the truth, Jimmy Warden was a trifle staggered by this situation. He did not see Matsura again at once; but here, in the house of the enemy, in the midst of a merciless life-and-death game—to experience such treatment, such formality! It left him rather up in the air, but none the less very much on his guard.

His meeting with Halsey, however, quite restored him to balance.

It was noon of the next day when they met. Warden was walking in the garden, waiting for the mess-call, when he descried the tall figure of Halsey approaching and recognized the aristocratic, handsome features. They were a trifle blurred now, as Warden noted with some satisfaction—the effect of the drug had not entirely worn off. Undoubtedly Halsey's normally acute brain was a trifle blurred also, although he came to a halt in palpable recognition.

"Ah — good morning!" he said pleasantly. "You're Warden, eh? I've heard a lot about you."

"Yes?" Warden could not feign any liking for the man, and did not try. "I've heard a good deal about you, too—from Miss Tully and others."

"Oh!" The dark eyes hardened. "Yes, you're the chap who fancies her, aren't you? I'd forgotten that."

THERE was momentary silence, ominous silence. Matsura appeared, doubtless to announce that luncheon was ready. Obviously work had gone well with him that morning; he was humming a queer Japanese air as he came, and was looking very happy—this quiet, spectacled little brown man, who soon would be lying there among the flowers!

Glazunoff appeared on the half-round steps of the entrance.

"Come along, gentlemen!" he called.

Still Halsey stood looking at Warden, then lifted one hand slightly, and Warden saw that the fingers of this hand were shaking. Suddenly he realized that Halsey was in the grip of a consuming, although not entirely obvious, passion. A spasm of sheer fury contracted the man's face for an instant.

"Ah!" he said, as though stifled. "You—you—"

His unspoken words failed. Glazunoff, seeing something amiss, was coming toward them.

Matsura had halted, staring at the two men.

"Be careful, you cheap crook," said Warden quietly. "She's where you'll not lay your filthy hands on her again."

Sharp and swift, Halsey's hand swooped. A pistol appeared. Warden, poised, flung himself forward before the irresolute hand could press trigger. He gripped Halsey's wrist with one hand, while the other swung in a blow to the stomach.

The two men went down in a lashing heap. Unleashed, Halsey's fury was that of a wild animal; what happened in this brief moment, Warden could not tell. The pistol went off in a smashing, stunning report close to his head, and in blind anger Warden's fist drove in again and again, while he gripped the pistol-wrist.

Then, suddenly, men were upon them, tearing them apart. Glazunoff was there, screaming harsh inarticulate oaths and orders. Warden found himself scrambling to his feet, two men hanging to him. He stood quietly, mastering his anger, staring at the incredible scene before him.

Glazunoff, in frantic rage, was striking Halsey, whose pistol had been torn away by one of the Russian servants. And, at one side, Matsura lay upon his back, smiling at the sky, his right arm encircling a bunch of flowers as though pressing them to his dead breast. That one wild bullet had gone through his brain, stilling its cleverness forever.

After an instant, Glazunoff had himself in hand, stepped back. Halsey was dragged away by two of the men. Warden was released, and Glazunoff, after one glance at the body of Matsura, turned to him. The livid features, the reptilian eyes, were tinged with madness; yet the man's voice was steady and cool.

"I saw what happened," said Glazunoff. "Not your fault, Warden. Oh, devil take all such fools! Dominetti will be furious about this; but it can't be helped. Now I'll have to take on Matsura's work, damn it. Come along to luncheon."

SO they went into the dining room, the two of them, and sat at table in strained and terrible silence, until a beaker of fiery vodka had unloosed the tongue of Glazunoff and restored him to himself. Then, cold and deadly, he accompanied Warden to his room and went on down the corridor to another door; his voice came in icy restrained anger, answered by the sulky tones of Halsey.

So the matter ended. When, an hour later, Warden encountered Halsey in the corridor, the confidence man was white and shaken,—but passed him without a look. Warden smiled grimly to himself; but he did not smile when, returning to his room, he found a summons to join Glazunoff in the large salon below.

Warden entered the room and found Glazunoff at the desk. The Russian beckoned and pointed to the telephone, which was off the rack; at the same time he took down the extra extension receiver and held it to his ear, his gaze intent upon Warden.

"Hello! This is Warden—ah! Prince Sergei?"

"Yes, Sergei Romanoff," came the voice in French. "I wish to inform you, Monsieur Warden, that there is no longer any question of my continuing the course of action decided upon at our meeting with M. Solomon. I wish that you would represent me and reach some agreement with Grand

Duke Basil and with Dominetti, along this line."

"Ask if he'll come here," murmured Glazunoff.

"Perhaps you will see Dominetti yourself?" said Warden, who was stunned by this intelligence.

"No, no!" said Sergei sharply. "I shall leave matters in your hands. You understand the situation, I have every confidence in you. I cannot reach M. Solomon, but I am glad to empower you to act for me at the meeting which takes place to-morrow."

"Wait!" exclaimed Warden. "You mean that you withdraw entirely from your agreement with Solomon?"

"Yes," came the astonishing response, in a tone of decision. "For reasons which I cannot go into now, I must withdraw. That is to say, if you can reach terms which seem fitting and proper to you. That is all."

Warden hung up the instrument, sank into a chair, and bit the end off a cigar, while Glazunoff watched him with a glint of triumph in the snaky eyes.

Sergei out of it, abandoning his agreement, refusing to go on with the plan outlined by Solomon—the plan which had every chance of making him master of Russia and a great figure in history! Why?

Then Warden started. How did it happen that Sergei had telephoned him here at this house? Only one answer was possible. North had received the message, Solomon had seen him there in the chauffeurs' rendezvous; Sergei had telephoned to make certain for them that Warden was here. A ruse — perhaps. Perhaps! Yet here were definite instructions, positive orders.

"You don't understand it, eh?" said Glazunoff, laughing lightly.

Warden regarded him frowningly. Diplomacy, here; careful words! Caution was needed now, if ever.

"No, I don't," he replied, with an affectation of bluntness. "I was supposed to make some arrangement with Dominetti and Basil, if possible, by which Sergei would throw all his influence behind Basil and share in the successful outcome. But now he's withdrawn entirely. Why? Why give up before the fight?"

GLAZUNOFF laughed again, subtly and deeply amused, it seemed.

"Well," he responded lightly, "for one thing, Basil doesn't care to share his throne with Sergei. For another, he doesn't need Sergei's influence. In fact, Sergei must be out of the way entirely—while he and Basil both live, there can be no agreement. Perhaps you can convince Dominetti that it would be better to throw Basil overboard, and get rid of him, and adopt Sergei?"

"Eh?" Warden flashed the Russian a keen glance. "Would that be possible?"

Glazunoff shrugged.

"Ask Dominetti—I can't say! You know how much Sergei would give up, how much he would promise; I don't. If he holds to his childish notions about Russia for the Russians, what use in talking? But I can tell you why he's withdrawn: he's a coward. He's learned about Ivan Vassilovitch being shot, about the forged notes being found. One of the afternoon papers is carrying a big story about the Russian plot to swamp the market with forged Bank of France notes, and is charging that Sergei Romanoff is behind it. The story will be suppressed, provided Sergei with-

draws from all further political action. Sergei got this news, and at once telephoned you. Understand? He's out of it entirely."

Jimmy Warden scowled. He perceived now that he had known only a part of the plot—that it went farther, had more ingenuity behind it, than he had supposed. No, it was no ruse. Solomon had hidden himself, Sergei was in a panic, and had quit.

"Damn it!" said Warden angrily.

Glazunoff chuckled again.

"Sorry," he said ironically. "I'll give you a tip, Warden. I fancy Dominetti would be glad to be able to present the meeting to-morrow with a signed statement on the part of Sergei—a statement which could be made public—agreeing to renounce any rights to the throne, and to hold aloof from all political action in future."

Warden started. "Sergei would never sign such an agreement!"

"Well, you heard what he just said, didn't you? And consider your own position. I'm giving you something to work on—a real tip, my friend. Partly for your sake, partly for my own. Let us be frank! You are in no position to dictate to us; make yourself useful, and it will mean a lot to you. On my own behalf—"

Glazunoff paused, blew a thin cloud of smoke, and gestured toward the garden.

"I do not care to face Dominetti when he is angry," he said simply. "The death of this Matsura, who was in charge of certain scientific work, will infuriate him. I should like to balance that with unexpected good news. This little affair with Sergei and Ivan Vassilovitch happens to be one of my own pet schemes. It has succeeded; if Sergei will sign such an agreement as I have outlined, and it can be laid before the meeting to-morrow—well, Signor Dominetti will be pleased! He will arrive in another hour or so, too."

"I see," murmured Warden.

Out of the mental confusion which had seized upon him, the American began to coördinate his thoughts, despairing as they were. He knew well enough that Glazunoff was trying to use him as a tool, yet he saw no better way out of the *impasse*. And Prince Sergei had given definite orders—had broken his agreement with Solomon, was ready to abandon everything. The streak of weakness in the man had come to the top.

"All right," said Warden. "Tell you what you do, Glazunoff. Write out what you want Sergei to sign, give the paper to me. If I reach some agreement in the matter with Dominetti, I can take it to Sergei and get his signature."

Glazunoff nodded.

"You'll not be allowed to leave here, however," he said, "until things are settled. Still, you can always use the telephone—and we can send him the paper! Yes, a good plan. I'll do it."

So it was agreed.

CHAPTER XV.

DOMINETTI ARRIVES.

JIMMY WARDEN felt an indescribable reluctance to meet Dominetti in any battle of wits, or to go ahead with the course upon which he had entered. Glazunoff sent him a typed sheet, in French, then Warden saw him depart in the Mercedes—probably to meet Dominetti. But for a long while Warden sat reading over those words and realizing what they meant.

The paper was a complete abdication

under most solemn oath, by Sergei—an abdication of his possible rights to the throne of all the Russias. Furthermore, not only was it a pledge to abstain from any political action, but it urged his adherents to give allegiance to Grand Duke Basil as head of the family.

No ruse was possible here. If Sergei signed this paper, it meant that Glazunoff's clever scheme had succeeded—he would have completely abandoned Solomon's plan and his agreement with Rome.

"We'll see," thought Warden, folding and pocketing the sheet of paper. "If he signs this, if he throws up a great project, a daring venture, because of a momentary panic—then let him rot! It isn't signed yet, anyhow. The whole thing may be framed up by Solomon to gain time. We'll see."

Boris Glazunoff, meanwhile, was speeding on his way along the outer circle of boulevards for the Porte de la Villette and Le Bourget.

The big Mercedes hummed along smoothly, at a high rate of speed. It might have been mere coincidence that an enclosed Sunbeam, whose GB license showed that it belonged across the Channel, and whose curtains were drawn, followed the same identical course but some little distance in the rear.

Reaching the Porte, Glazunoff's chauffeur alighted. He did not make the usual pretense of inspecting his gasoline tank, but darted into the little cubby occupied by the Douanerie and came out again, tucking his reëntry ticket into his cap. The Sunbeam was drawn up directly behind the Mercedes, and its chauffeur, a yellow man—possibly Chinese—was at the moment going in for his ticket.

During the momentary absence of Glazunoff's chauffeur, however, something had happened.

Two men had alighted from the Sunbeam. One of them jerked open the left-hand door of the Mercedes, while the other precipitated himself inside and shoved a pistol against the body of the unsuspecting Glazunoff. The first man slammed the door and mounted into the front seat—the car being, naturally, right-hand drive.

Thus, when the chauffeur came back to his place, he looked up, astonished, to see a yellow man sitting there and unobtrusively holding a pistol to cover him.

"Quickly!" said the Chinese in French. "Get up! Drive!"

Helpless, the chauffeur obeyed the order. Once in his seat, a glance into his rear-view mirror showed him a second man seated beside Glazunoff. The Mercedes pulled out and went on along the market-street of La Villette.

INSIDE the car, Dr. Erh Lim Lee smiled a little as he held his weapon against Glazunoff's body.

"Don't take your hands from your lap, please," the Chinese diplomat said in his low-voiced way.

The Russian looked at Lee with a sort of contempt.

"What? You think that you can get away with a thing like this?"

"I seem to be doing it," and Dr. Lee smiled grimly. "I warned you, my friend! Now, I want that letter back."

"Fool!" Glazunoff said disdainfully. "Do you think I keep it in my pocket? It went long ago to other people, was translated, will be given to the press to-morrow night."

Lee, rotund and sparkling-eyed, seemed for a moment aghast.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed.

"Nothing is impossible," said Glaz-

unoff, with a slightly bored air, "as you, yourself a man of science, should know. That letter will be of great interest to French readers."

Lee broke into a sudden laugh, soft and exultant.

"Ah, liar!" he retorted. "You don't know what was in the letter, then! You haven't had it translated! You aren't aware that it contained the contribution of Chinese laboratories to the ultra-sonic work of Solomon's chemist Pearson—which you, certainly, would never make public!"

Glazunoff turned livid at this mockery. Lee had pierced his bluff.

"Well?" he snapped. "End this foolery."

"I shall," said Lee. "The letter is lost. You read my papers. I can do nothing; but I can save my face—have you forgotten that we of the older world believe in saving face? I can kill you, and—"

The Mercedes, over the viaduct, was purring out along the Le Bourget road, fields on either side, the gray gleam of the hangars out on the left and ahead. The Sunbeam followed at a little distance. Abruptly, with a twist of his wrist, the chauffeur spun the steering wheel, then applied the brakes.

The big car went into the ditch, came to an abrupt halt there.

Lee was flung from the seat, and Glazunoff fell on top of him, striking. On the front seat, the Chinese there was hurled against the windshield; as he struck, the chauffeur gripped his pistol, tore it way, struck him across the head. He fell limply.

The Sunbeam came up alongside, and the Russian chauffeur covered its driver with the pistol. After an instant the left side door of the Mercedes opened; Glazunoff stepped out, cool and rather disdainful. The road was empty, the two cars were alone. The insistent hum of a machine came from overhead.

Glazunoff gave his chauffeur quiet, swift directions, while the driver of the Sunbeam, helpless, made no protest. The Russian knew that Dr. Lee was altogether too big a man to be sequestered without a large and serious outcry being raised; something which was by no means to be desired just at this moment. On the other hand, Glazunoff wanted, and knew that his master wanted, certain information.

The chauffeur dragged out Lee's unconscious body, bleeding from the mouth, and hurriedly loaded it into the Sunbeam. Then, at a command from Glazunoff, the Sunbeam's driver turned his car and departed.

The Chinese whom the chauffeur had knocked out was now put into the tonneau of the Mercedes and bound securely, his mouth wrapped with car-cleaning cloths. Boris Glazunoff glanced at his watch, and nodded with a satisfied air.

"Good work, very good work!" he told the chauffeur approvingly. "Go on to the airdrome and take your time—we're still ahead of the London plane."

THE unfortunate yellow man in the rear of the car was the same who had come with Dr. Lee to the Abode of Bad Spirits—beyond doubt, his chief aide. Glazunoff went through his pockets and located some papers and letters; and had excellent cause for feeling that he had accomplished a very good day's work. The death of Matsura was doubly compensated for, he reflected.

From the window of his room, which overlooked the garden, Jimmy Warden beheld the return of the Mer-

cedes. Dominetti and Glazunoff alighted, then a smaller bound figure was carried out of the car and brought into the house.

The afternoon was not yet over, and Warden conjectured that Dominetti's first thought would be to interrogate him; indeed, five minutes later, one of the Russian servants brought a request that he come to the salon at once.

There he found Halsey, Glazunoff, and Dominetti himself, who occupied the seat at the desk, and the bound but no longer gagged figure of Lee's aide—a rather thin little man, imperturbable, whose sloe eyes looked out upon the room blankly enough. Beside the chair in which the yellow man sat, stood the two large Russian servants.

As Warden entered, Dominetti stood up and extended his hand, smilingly.

"Ah, Mr. Warden! Our last meeting was one thing—this is another. I am glad to see you here, and doubly glad because of your errand. Take a chair, make yourself comfortable—and, I warn you, do not interfere. This man, who is an assassin, must be questioned—and let me remind you that I shall not tolerate any intervention."

Cold, inhuman, his glittering gray eyes alive with savage emotion, Dominetti's words and air belied his surface appearance of an impeccable gentleman. The man fairly radiated energy and dominating vigor.

Again, as in London, Warden felt that miserable sensation of futility, of helplessness, as he sank into a chair.

Too, he had the feeling that something terrible was about to happen, something from which at all costs he must hold himself aloof—and in this he was right.

Dominetti resumed his seat and fastened his gaze on the unfortunate saffron man.

"From the papers found in your pockets," he said, his voice metallic and sharp-edged, "you are Wu Hong Sze; is this correct?"

"Yes," the prisoner responded in English.

"I have heard of you," went on Dominetti. "You are a graduate of Chicago; when Dr. Lee went into politics, you refused a professorship of physics at the University of Tokyo in order to take up Lee's scientific work, in acoustics and geophysics. Your discoveries in the way of solutions have been followed by Glazunoff, here, for some time."

He glanced at the Russian, who nodded. "Yes. The flocculation of solutions—his apparatus is now in use by the American Department of Agriculture, I understand."

"You flatter me," said Wu, irony in his voice.

"Not at all," replied Dominetti, and took up a paper from the desk. "Here is a letter in Chinese which Dr. Lee was bringing to Mr. Solomon from certain of your associates in Nankin. Will you kindly translate it for us?"

"Certainly not," returned Wu Hong, calmly.

DOMINETTI laid aside the letter. "Very well; it has already been translated, and deals with the destruction of protoplasm and blood corpuscles by means of ultrasonic waves," he said. "Now, I desire certain information from you. I wish to know where Dr. Lee is living in Paris, and when he is going on to the League conference at Geneva. These two things. No more. Then you shall go free."

"I have nothing to say," Wu Hong answered.

Dominetti leaned back, made a sign

to the two Russians. They leaned over and seized the arms of the Chinaman, loosing them from the bonds.

Next instant, a scream broke from the unfortunate man as his arms were twisted around the high back of his chair. Warden half started up, then sank back, white-faced, as a pistol in Halsey's hand covered him.

Another scream burst from the tortured lips of Wu Hong—one of his arms fell, dangling horribly.

"These two things, no more," said Dominetti. He might have been carved of stone as he sat there, looking into the distended eyes of the yellow man.

"Nothing," gasped Wu Hong.

The word trailed away in a gasp and a low moan, as his other arm fell, broken. His saffron features darkened, his teeth were clenched on his upper lip, and the blood came from it. But his staring eyes, fastened upon Dominetti, were resolute, unflinching.

"Your knives," said the Italian.

Warden closed his eyes as the Russians produced long blades. He sat there quivering, at each instant dreading to hear another of those terrible cries of man's agony—but he caught only a stifled gasp, a groan. He dared not look to see what was happening.

"Bah! Take him away," came the voice of Dominetti.

Sick and faint, Warden looked up as a broken, crimson-smeared thing was borne out of the room. Halsey looked rather white, and brought a bottle of whisky from the massive cupboard, with glasses. Glazunoff poured drinks, and, smiling, brought a glass to Warden.

"Here you are—look as though you needed it, old chap," he observed.

Warden gulped down the whisky thankfully, and tried to pull himself together. Dominetti was swinging around his chair, to face Warden. Had the man really hoped to extort his information from Wu Hong—or was the scene of horror merely a prelude, deliberately designed to break down the American?

"Come, come, you must not take these things so much to heart," said Dominetti. "Now, Mr. Warden, let us put our cards on the table! Here, take a cigarette and make yourself comfortable."

Warden accepted the cigarette and lighted it at the match Dominetti held.

"You do not, by chance," asked the Italian smoothly, "know anything about this Dr. Lee?"

"No," returned Warden. "I know nothing about him."

Dominetti nodded. "Probably not. Before proceeding to your actual business—yesterday you mentioned a certain treaty. May I inquire just how you learned of this treaty?"

WARDEN saw Glazunoff watching him with a half-smile—so, then! They knew the treaty had disappeared, knew he must have taken it. Here the truth, the desperate truth, must serve him, and nothing else.

"I found it in a room of which you know," said Warden calmly. "It seemed to be the only thing worth taking—so I took it."

"Yes?" Dominetti smiled, and his voice was very soft. "And where is the document now?"

"At the American Embassy, I presume," said Warden. "I sent it there by messenger."

There was an instant of startled silence. Halsey appeared to know nothing about the treaty; his manner was somewhat puzzled, curious.

Glazunoff, at Warden's words, caught his breath and sent a half-

startled glance at Dominetti, as though in fear. But the Italian's singular gray eyes did not swerve from Warden, and displayed no hint of emotion.

"You are a more dangerous antagonist than I had believed possible, Mr. Warden," he said. "Well, as to the treaty, let it pass. Now for your own status. Are you still an antagonist? Are you working for Solomon?"

"No," said Warden. "My only interest in this affair has been to get Miss Tully out of the hands of that dog Halsey. It was accomplished. Having been dragged into the business, however, I undertook to act as representative for Prince Sergei."

"And it interested you, eh?" Dominetti laughed lightly. "You are no doubt aware of the agreement between Sergei and Rome, eh? You know a great deal?"

"Certainly." Warden was cool enough now, perfectly master of himself, speaking without hesitation yet weighing every word before it left his lips. "I was informed of all the details of your own scheme to back Grand Duke Basil, and I'm aware of the meeting to-morrow."

"Proving that you are a man to be trusted," said Dominetti. "Good. If others trust you, I can trust you also—particularly as you are in my hands. You came to issue some ultimatum on the part of Sergei, no doubt; but things have changed. You are now aware that Prince Sergei no longer desires power and glory—all he desires is to save his own precious skin, eh?"

"Yes," said Warden bitterly.

He knew what this defection would mean to Solomon, whose dream had been a glorious one, and practical enough to boot—that swift march of fifty thousand men into the heart of old Russia!

"Yes, blast him!" the American went on. "The fool had only to use what was given him, carry out the plans made for him—and now his yellow streak has smashed everything! He deserves all he gets. I've no sympathy for him; however, I'll have to act for him."

Dominetti watched him, half-smiling, as he spoke. The sincerity of Warden was clear enough to all three other men.

"Sympathy, no," said the Italian slowly. "His weakness has astonished even me, I must confess. I broke down Solomon's organization in order that we might strike at Sergei—but we need not have uncovered him, perhaps, so carefully. He was not worth the effort, eh? Well, fear not. All his life the man will be haunted by the great chances he flung away; but I do not think he will live so very long."

Glazunoff and Halsey exchanged a glance, but Warden did not observe it. He was getting out the typed document that Glazunoff had prepared for him, and now he laid it before Dominetti.

"GLANCE over this," he said. "I don't know just what, precisely, Sergei wants in the way of terms—I presume in regard to finances and other things, since his own brother is paying you a thousand francs a month hush money."

"Eh? Eh?" At this calm thrust, Dominetti started, and his eyes widened on Warden. "You American devil—who told you that? Sergei himself did not know it!"

"I learned it," and Warden shrugged carelessly. "What matter?"

He could perceive at once that this trifle had raised him appreciably in the estimation of the enemy. Irony! If

only Sergei Romanoff had not that fatal yellow streak, what might yet have been accomplished!

Dominetti returned the paper, beaming.

"Excellent," he stated in his cold manner. "I want that paper signed before witnesses to-night. Suppose you telephone Sergei now, read it to him, ask for his consent; then we can send it over at once to his hotel. The Hôtel de Choiseul, is it not? You can tell him that in return for his signature I will obtain a signed document indorsed by Grand Duke Basil, Prince Seminoff, and Baron Tondern, the chief leaders of Basil's party, agreeing to the following conditions:

"Sergei is to be retained in his titles and estates, upon the recovery of Russia. As Basil is childless, Sergei is to be nominated heir to the throne. Until Russia is recovered, Sergei is to be given a yearly grant of fifty thousand pounds for life, to be paid from the funds of the late dowager empress. Satisfactory?"

Satisfactory, indeed—it was madness! Even Glazunoff stared at his chief, startled by such terms. Warden met the cold eyes, which gave no hint of what was in the mind of Dominetti.

"You will give a guarantee that cannot be broken? But why?" asked Warden cautiously. "You offer a large price for a signature—"

"Which I need," said Dominetti. "Boris, get Sergei on the telephone."

That there was some trick to it, Warden was convinced; yet, if such a document were given Sergei and were made public—

"Wait a minute," said Warden calmly. "It is understood that Sergei will receive this abdication at once for his signature; but he will not return it signed until I telephone him that the other document is in my possession, some time to-morrow—"

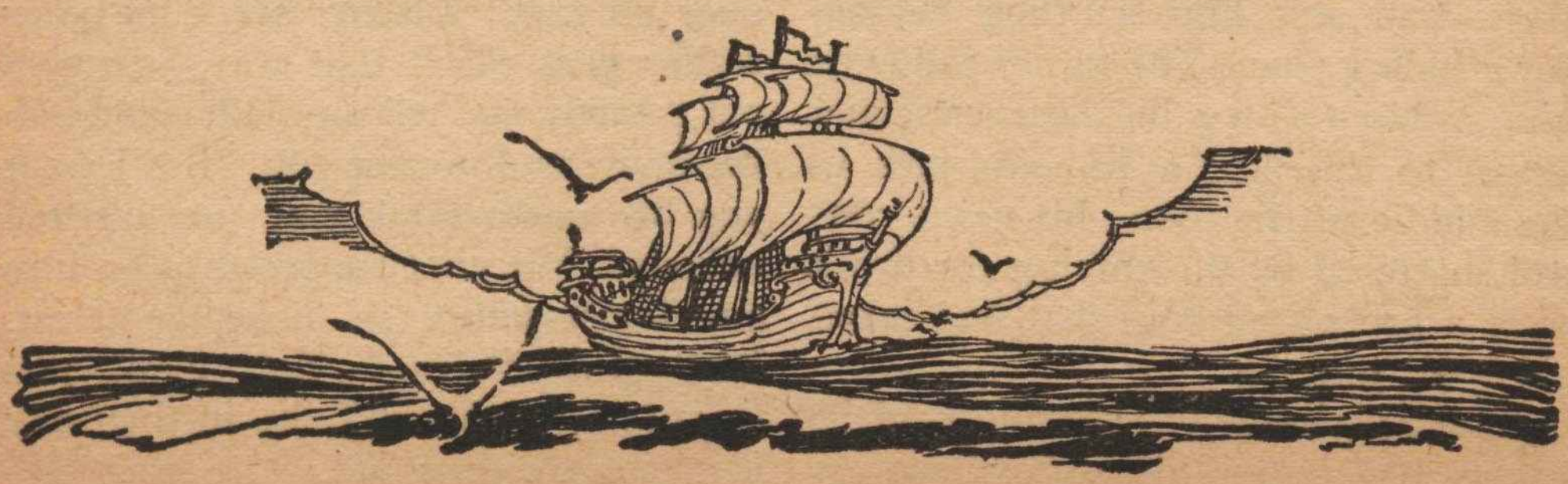
Dominetti laughed. "You suspect me? Well, it shall be as you say. No, my friend—our cards are in sight."

Warden knew better. That Grand Duke Basil should recognize Sergei as his heir, was nothing short of absurd; the two men were bitter enemies. That Sergei should be given an annuity of fifty thousand pounds, was amazing. Dominetti must want that abdication very badly, or else had some trick up his sleeve.

"And perhaps he's doubtful of Sergei's good faith," thought Warden. "Well, we'll soon know about it now—if Sergei is playing some game, he'll refuse to sign that paper. If he's really abandoned Solomon and thrown up the whole thing, like a yellow cur, then he'll be glad enough of the terms!"

Two minutes later Warden took up the telephone and found Sergei on the wire.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



The partners stared, aghast at the meaning of her words

Expiation

Fate had never given too generous a deal to John Hepplewhite—and that day in the bank, the cards seemed hopelessly stacked against him

By FREDERICK NIVEN

ONE of John Hepplewhite's earliest impressions had been the sight of his mother bent over the sewing in her lap, and weeping silently, wordlessly into her cupped hands; and another was of hiding under the table from his father.

His father's erratic actions in the yard, incomprehensible to the boy—then—had sent him scuttling indoors for a hiding place. The father followed him, whooping incoherencies, and began to leap like a jumping-jack in the middle of the room, his nerve control shattered by the craving for drink after a protracted bout that had taken his every cent.

John's boyhood was not all like that. There had been his enjoyment of music, even casual notes drifting in through open windows. The neighbors were kind, too; because of his mother. And the policeman on their beat was a big, burly, Irish angel in the boy's eyes.

"Now, see here, sonny," he said once. "I know how it is. Your mother was gently raised. And she's fond of your paw. She don't want publicity over all this. Listen: any time your father goes off it that way, you step out smartly and tell me. I'll come into the house and protect you. But I want you to understand you mustn't tell nobody. We ain't supposed to go into any house unless to make an arrest. It's ag'in' orders. So, mind, you mustn't tell folks if I slip in that way just to scare your dad. Get me?"

The boy nodded sadly. It was a heart-breaking thing to have to listen to a policeman, in all kindness, talking of putting a scare into his dad; and even at eleven years of age he could realize it so. Often the policeman stood behind the kitchen door, to be ready if Jack Hepplewhite's father, instead of chasing—or fleeing from—things invisible to others round the table, should make an assault on wife or son.

Once, when the ravings were over, the officer whispered: "Well, I'll get along. You're all right now," then took from a pocket a mouth-organ and presented it to the kid. Yes, people were kind.

HEPPLEWHITE senior must have been endowed with a remarkable constitution, for he assuredly played ducks and drakes with it. But when the boy was about twelve his father disappeared, went out of their lives. No one knew where he had gone, but some thought, perhaps, back to Central America.

The boy John, leaving school, went into a bank as junior clerk. He used to try to cheer his mother.

"Never mind, mother, don't worry," he would say. "I'm working now. You'll have a lovely home yet."

In a vague, boyish way, Jack came to realize that his mother loved his father still for the brilliant but weak man he had been—long ago, in the days before Jack could remember. She would smile at her son through the tears, when he surprised her weeping; would dry her eyes, and force the ghost of a laugh for his sake.

She never told him that her husband had absconded with a wad of bills from the accounting firm that, in pity for her, had kept him in its employ, despite his periodical "bats." The employers, in a last stroke of kindness, tried to keep the knowledge of that embezzlement from her; but somehow it leaked out. Hence she sewed and sewed, on into the small hours—always sewing, to gather together somehow the amount which Hepplewhite had taken, and to repay it.

But the making of the sum was slow. At last she went, with but a portion of it, to his former employers. She was ushered into the room where, at a big desk-table, were the two partners of the accounting firm. She was constrained before them.

"I've come," she said, "to make a part payment of the money that—well, you know what I mean. I've been working to gather it together, but it is so slow. Perhaps—if—installments—" she stammered.

Her intention made them stare at her. Then they looked, uncomfortably, across their table, each reading the eyes of the other; and the elder spoke:

"My dear lady, you will just dismiss that thought from your mind. It is intolerable to me—to us."

His partner nodded, blunt with the embarrassment of a normal man who has to do a good thing publicly.

"Can't be done. Your money's no good here. Now, no more, *please!* Forget it!"

She returned home with a choked feeling of the kindness in men. The boy never heard anything of all that. Mrs. Hepplewhite realized that for one of his years there had been enough of shadow over him. But he was glad to note she tired her eyes less over that sewing.

The years passed with no word of Hepplewhite. The boy grew into a young man; the mouth-organ had been

replaced by a violin; and the shadows of his early years were almost forgotten in the earnest plans for his business future. One day the manager at the bank called him into his private room to have a talk with the visiting inspector.

"I've just been hearing about you," the inspector said with a swift, shrewd glance. "Your manager gives you a good name. It's time you got promotion. We are creating new branches in territory that is being opened up in the west. I'd like you to go to Chelacko as accountant. It will be not only a step up, but a step toward another step. It will be an entirely different sort of banking there—chiefly mining and lumbering."

CHELACKO was not by any means as wild and woolly as Jack had expected. There were stores with the same sort of goods as at home behind their plate-glass windows, even if the great mountains did look down, ragged-edged with forests, on all sides; even if, going home under the arc lamps from a concert, one could hear, on autumn nights, coyotes far beyond the town yelping of the weather's change. He found that these new, little bustling Western towns, dropped in the midst of wilderness though they were, offered all up-to-date comforts. When he was finally settled, his mother, he decided, could be happy in this land, where one could "make friends without half trying." She could soon have the comforts her husband's weakness had stolen from her.

He put up his card on the counter:

JOHN HEPPLEWHITE
Accountant

There all could see it, from the local lumber king, their star client, to the dilapidated old man who took the place of scrub-lady. The manager had his own home on the hill. But the employees—accountant, teller, ledger-keeper, junior clerk—all slept in rooms above the bank.

The little bank community looked upon Jack as a distinct acquisition, with his violin. Seeing its case among his belongings, they asked him to produce it and let them hear. They were not prepared for what he so wholeheartedly gave them—for whatever he did, he did with all his power. He could truly play. Prospectors in town for a night, and lumberjacks passing by, would halt a little while in the street outside and even sit on the edge of the sidewalk to listen. Even the shabby old wreck who cleaned out the office began to take a long time to get through with his sweeping and dusting, hoping to hear the music. And when he had that luck, it was not till John stopped playing that his quavering voice would come from below: "I'm through, sir."

"Oh, all right," the new accountant would say tolerantly, and go down to see him out and the door again closed.

There were few people in Chelacko who cared to do any work with a mop and a pail. The bank was glad to get any one; and a poor specimen of humanity it had got, truly, a doddering fellow with trembling hands and rheumy eyes. He used to come into the bank just at the closing hour of four each day, and then begin emptying the waste-paper baskets. The staff would put away ledgers, close the safe, pass upstairs to wash and rest before going along to the restaurant, at seven or so for supper.

This wilted scrub-man, commonly known as "old man Smith," was a waterlogged derelict, by all appearance.

The bank boys were distantly sorry for him, pottering round at his age, with broom and pail and duster. Few spoke to him, and seldom did he speak when not first addressed. But it seemed he had to speak to John Hepplewhite one night.

"Young man, you can certainly play the violin," he quavered. "I've been through with my work an hour and just sitting down here listening to you. Where may you have learned it?"

"I mostly taught myself."

"Well, well! Haven't been where you could get music instruction?"

"Oh, I was in the East in a town where I could get lessons, but I never had the price," and Jack laughed cheerfully enough.

"Oh." The old man seemed a bit sobered by that, "Back East, eh?"

"Yes. Norwich."

"Oh. Norwich. And your folks could not afford to give you the training. Too bad, too bad. But you've trained yourself. You can play. Maybe you'll quit banking some day and go on the concert platform."

Jack made no reply to that.

"Your father back East?" asked old man Smith.

"Er—no."

"Your—mother? She still living?"

"Yes. She's well, thanks."

"Well, well. You'll be having her out, I suppose?"

"Some day. But I'm to be moved from here before long. This is just temporary. I'm only waiting till I see where they move me to. Then she'll come."

The son did not recognize his father, but the father had recognized the son.

Occasional little talks they used to have thereafter; and the young man was glad afterward that he had never showed by look or innuendo any contempt for the hand-me-down aspect of the cleaner.

THEN came the affair that proved that this new West, which had not displayed itself as so wild and woolly to Jack Hepplewhite, could be wild enough, in spots.

Old man Smith had stepped into the bank from the street at one minute to four, with a click of pail on mop handle. The manager came from his room, swinging a bunch of keys, and said: "All right." The teller opened the cage. The bookkeeper was ready with his books at the word of command.

The accountant snapped a clip like a heron's beak over the gathered papers on his desk. The junior clerk covertly removed a copy of "Jack Harkaway" from under his blotter to his breast pocket. The clock gave that little warning cough, before the strike. Everything moved along according to routine.

The door opened again. A man walked in with a handkerchief across his face, snapped the door shut behind him, and said: "All hands up! And speedy!"

Then suddenly:

"No reaching for a gun!" he exclaimed, and down came his gun hand. The peppy young ledger-keeper, whose hands had wavered as they rose, stuck them up, quite rigid.

The bandit moved over to his desk and, his eyes shuttling quickly from one to another, felt on the shelf under it, confiscated the revolver that lay there and of which the ledger-keeper's so slight uncertainty in the raising of his hands had apprised him. He was as they say, on his toes. He was onto his job.

It all happened with great celerity.

The clock that had clicked its warning struck four, then.

"Get together, some," the holdup man commanded them, in a harsh, metallic voice. "Close up there in the body of the church—and nobody holler, or I'll just pop you all off like shelling peas. I've a bullet for each of you in this gatling gun."

He gave a quick, sidelong look at old Smith quivering over his broom, obviously too frightened to move. Then he circled to the safe as in some slow dance, a mocking and sinister saraband, facing his bunch of prisoners. With a backward-thrust hand he rifled the safe, dropping the little bundles and pouches of cash into a sack.

"No! No waver of your hands. Lock the fingers together over you, it helps some. Get busy! Lock 'em—what I say goes!"

The safe rifled, he circled again, backing to the teller's cage. There was a step up into it, so that the teller was raised—like the barkeepers of old—above the level of the clients on the other side. He stumbled slightly as he backed in, against the edge of the step.

It was not enough of a stumble for what Jack Hepplewhite attempted to do.

As the man stumbled, Jack made a sudden leap forward and his hand swirled down into a shelf, down and out, and there was an automatic in his hand.

No, the robber's stumble was not bad enough to warrant this life-and-death gamble. For it is not often a man goes into that outlawed profession without practice, any more than into the legerdemain or conjuring profession. His hand moved too. His gun roared, a heavy thud of a sound in that closed place.

But the trembling old floor cleaner had been as quick as his son, or the bandit. Quicker, indeed. Even as Jack moved, old man Smith leaped on the holdup man. He knew—knew only too well what would follow! He leaped at the bandit's arm and made a thrust to knock it aside, with a desperate cry of: "Oh, my boy!"

He did not deflect the six-gun quite quickly enough. He got the bullet intended for Hepplewhite.

As he fell the thief's hand flicked back, cocking his gun again; but, in the fraction of time between that and the throw-down, Jack blazed away. His was a self-ejecting automatic. He got in two swift shots.

The holdup man crumpled down on top of the huddled form of the broom-and-pail failure. And both were dead.

It was all as swift as that. It was over. There lay the two bodies, one atop the other, and there was a moment's silence while all the men of the bank stared, aghast. The clock ticked on, loud in that hush. The acrid odor of firing stung their nostrils. All over.

The bank authorities later tried to discover if "old man Smith" left any dependents, with a view to proffering a pension; but it seemed his affairs were utterly unknown in Chelacko. It was in fact, as the manager, in his final report on that inquiry, remarked:

> He was very uncommunicative. Even among the staff, the only person with whom he ever exchanged more than a word was Mr. Hepplewhite, the accountant, whose life he saved. And Mr. Hepplewhite tells me that Smith never spoke to him of any relatives or, indeed, of any intimate or personal matter at all.

THE END.

The Men Who Make The Argosy

COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

Author of "Caged"

I WAS born in Kansas City, Missouri, October 31, 1886, and so, no matter how I twist it, I'm forty-three now. When I was fifteen, I ran away from home and joined a small town repertory company. When that went broke, I joined another and another and another, and finally there weren't any more. So I hit a black one into Lancaster, Missouri, and joined the Cook and Barrett Circus as a clown. That lasted some time.

Finally, when I was about twenty-one, I found myself back in Kansas City with a yen to get into the newspaper business. The city editor wasn't looking, so I sneaked in. Being in constant disgrace as a nice, sweet, cut-to-the-rut young man, with predictions running about one hundred to one that I'd land in the penitentiary, the city editor probably thought I ought to know a lot about it and made me a police reporter. From that I soon graduated to a specialist on crime, covering all big criminal assignments in Missouri, Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska. During this time, I covered thirteen hangings and the sheriff never once got the right man, and me standing right there on the scaffold every time.

I also covered some two hundred murder trials; suicides were a bore. They always happened when I was trying to sneak away for an afternoon at the old Century Theater, where Billy Watson's Beef Trust was the knockout of the season.

About this time, in a fit of aberration, I wrote a circus story. Somebody bought it. That gave me an idea, so I went out to Denver and got a job as the press agent of the Sells Floto Circus, which had at that time Buffalo Bill as its star. I was with the show for five or six years, filling in the winter season by working on the Denver *Post*, thus combining the circus and what goes with the newspaper business.

And all the time I kept writing circus stories. Tear and gas bombs had not been invented then. They couldn't stop me. The war came along and again somebody wasn't looking; I got into the United States Marines. One day a commission came along, and since nobody else was there, I took it for myself. So then they sent Lieutenant Cooper to France. But they sent me too late. I fooled 'em and came back. So then the war ended.

I guess I've written for twenty-five or thirty magazines, mostly of late years for *Collier's, Saturday Evening Post, Country Gentleman* and *Ladies' Home Journal.* I have twenty-one books on the shelf. Four or five of them have been halfway well known—"Lions and Tigers and Everything," "Under the Big Top," "Oklahoma," "Go North, Young Man," and so forth.

And now I'm still writing circus stories and crime stories and stories about the West and the North and so forth. I live at Lake Edith, Idaho Springs, Colorado, but spend a good part of my time in New York in the winter, punishing the typewriter. Lake Edith freezes in October. Why stay at a lake when there ain't no fishin'?

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

AN APPRECIATED TRIBUTE

AMONG the finest letters of commendation we ever received is the following, from a bishop of the Apostolic Orthodox Church. We felt the same as the bishop about Theodore Roscoe's story and are glad to give it this public acclaim:

Windsor, Ontario.

I note that many gentlemen write to you under the "Argonotes" heading giving their points of view upon the merits of stories contained within your covers. I have never joined the merry gentlemen who form that very interesting department, not because I was unappreciative, but because I am under no delusions as to my lack of requirements as a correspondent.

I have been a constant reader of the ARGOSY from the time, twenty-five years ago, when it used to appear in its everlasting orange covers, through the changes of a generation to the present day. And I have found it a source of relief and mental rest through many a weary hour and trying time, and its material has always been maintained upon such a good all-around standard that one accepted it without comment.

But I happened upon a story in the December 28 issue, by Mr. Theodore Roscoe, "Hard-Boiled Cayhill's Christmas Eve Party," that impelled me to pen a few lines of commendation. You have probably had before, and will have again, stories of more grand and thundering quality, but by no manner of means will another ever be written that so sounds the depths of humanity upon the better side; the effect of the true spirit of Christmas upon all kinds and conditions of men.

As I read it again and again, the whole of that scene in the German dugout visualized itself before me; the little cake upon the plank board—oh, how much it meant to those who sent it! The lone bottle of wine; the boy soldiers—but why go on? The men, the Bread, the Wine, the candles, the Christmas tree. Unconsciously or otherwise (and I doubt the former), Mr. Roscoe has in that little scene drawn a picture of the whole life of the Master, the Birth and the Death—and the world He saved and the men He redeemed.

We in the Greek Orthodox Church, especially in the English branch, which is uniting all the Russians, Roumanians, Jugo-Slavs and others into Canadians or Americans, have, on a milder scale, met many a scene like this. Little festivities which have brought together Roumanian or Bulgar and made them forget Dobrudja; Hungarian and Jugo-Slav, and erased memories bitter of the Banat; and many another ancestral hate even as the "Silent Night" of the German youth erased the bitterness from the mind of Hard-Boiled Cayhill.

As I have remarked, I am not of the substance of which authors are made, and therefore perhaps as a critic am not very convincing. But I did not come to criticize, but simply to express my pleasure and joy in a little story, short but saying something in every word, a story full of manliness, but unutterably sweet and tender. Mere comment can never bring out what lies in it, but he who reads cannot fail to be uplifted in spirit by this creation of Mr. Roscoe, so noble, yet so kind.

With all good wishes and blessings I am
Your servant in Christ,
RT. REV. WILLIAM S. HAMMOND, D. D.,
Bishop, Apostolic Orthodox Church.

ROSCOE'S stories have been bringing him many fine letters lately, but sometimes without addresses. He asks us to print the following reply to a good letter which came without address:

St. Catharines, Ontario, Can.

MY DEAR M. R. S.:

Thank you very much for your most interesting letter; sorry you didn't amend an address so it could have been answered more thoroughly. Coincidental about your father—that he should have undergone an experience somewhat similar to that of my character *Thibaut Corday* in "An Eye For An Eye." Sometimes fiction isn't so fictitious after all. The "palm trees outlined against the moon; the tinkle of caravan bells; the jingle of golden anklets" *is* great stuff, isn't it? And I'd like to put that dancing girl you mention

into a yarn, if you and ARGOSY don't mind. We're very glad you like the stories.

Hazrat salaamat!

THEODORE ROSCOE.

FACT IS THIS

DID you like "Beans for Backbone," by Richard A. Martinsen, in this issue? If you found it realistic, there is a reason—as Mr. Martinsen explains:

It may interest the readers of my story, "Beans for Backbone," to know that the yarn isn't half so much fiction as fact. The general run of melodramatic "Mountie" fiction gives me a chuckle, since the actual achievements of the Northwest Mounted (now officially the Royal Canadian Mounted), have the most ingenious plots imagination could concoct stopped both ways from the jack.

"Beans for Backbone," for instance, really isn't a "story"; it's pointblank history. About all I personally have contributed are a few excerpts of dialogue. And it's only one of the gallant deeds with which the record of this splendid force teems.

RICHARD A. MARTINSEN.

ANOTHER natural bridge in Florida this reader calls to our attention:

Miami, Fla.

I notice an article in your ARGOSY of March 30, 1929, entitled "Florida's Natural Bridge."

Florida has more than one, it appears. About seven or eight miles north of Miami, there is a beautiful natural bridge spanning a small stream called Arch Creek. This is located at a small town also called Arch Creek. The scenery at this point is beautiful.

This bridge differs from the one in northwestern Florida, inasmuch as it is very much visited. It is on one of the main highways, leading north from Miami.

ALMA B. KLOPPEL.

NOW for a few favorite authors:

Los Angeles, Cal.

My favorite author is John H. Thompson. His short stories are both snappy and refreshing.

Next comes Fred MacIsaac, whose novels are his nominating vote. H. Bedford-Jones has placed himself third with his novel, "Cyrano."

W. Wirt is entitled to fourth place by reason of his good though bloody stories, while F. R. Buckley, J. E. Grinstead and Kenneth Perkins are tied for fifth. George F. Worts and Ray Cummings come next, closely followed by Eugene Cunningham, Loring Brent and Bertrand L. Shurtleff. All in all, ARGOSY is perfect.

The best stories of the past year are: "Cyrano," "Beyond the Law," "The Mental Marvel," "The Raider," "The Spectral Passenger," "Phantom in the Rainbow," "The Sea Girl" and "He Rules Who Can."

Thank you for a most enjoyable book.

FRED C. VOGEL.

CERTAINLY these impossible story fans are enthusiastic:

Portland, Ore.

I have been reading the ARGOSY for quite some time and want to thank you for the splendid array of stories that you have had in the past.

The impossible stories are all good, although some are better then others. Who knows but what these authors are but giving us a look into what future years of study and science will give to us?

Among my favorite authors are: Francis Lynde, Don Waters, Erle Stanley Gardner, Fred MacIsaac and Ray Cummings.

In the last issues, "Maza of the Moon" is about the outstanding serial, although "Run, Dan, Run!" was a mighty good story.

Thanks for many an interesting hour of reading during the past year and will look forward to many more next year.

DONALD LAIRD.

TWO ingenious defenses this reader makes for the five nines that got into Robert Terry Shannon's poker deck in "Almost a Gentleman":

Elmira, N. Y.

Have been a contented reader of your magazine for a long time and never have had any fault to find. I am taking this opportunity to come to the defense of Robert Terry Shannon in his story, "Almost a Gentleman."

If the poker game had been played with the "joker wild" as it is sometimes done, five nines could have shown up during the play. Incidentally I sat in a game one night, using a brand new deck of good make, and saw five natural "eights" appear in the first showdown. The eight of hearts had been duplicated.

FRED REYNOLDS.

HERE is a convert to the "impossibles." Incidentally, Edgar Franklin is now on the schedule with a serial for a few months from now:

Fresno, Cal.

Some time ago, when I told you I didn't like the "impossible" type of story, I hadn't seen "Planet of Peril," "The Girl in the Atom" and "Maza of the Moon," just started. I surely enjoyed all of these impossible ones, so let them come ahead.

Along with the others, I was delighted to see the railroad serial, "A Road at Stake," and I, too, bid a hearty welcome to the return of the *Railroad Man's Magazine*.

There is, however, one type of story you haven't served us for some time, and that is the comedy serial. I still remember the enjoyment I got reading "What Was That?" by Edgar Franklin, also "Anything Goes," by the same author.

I am sure that there are many hundreds of us that would welcome a comedy serial of six or eight parts, with a laugh packed in every paragraph. We get too few laughs, at any rate, so I hope you can get the funny writers to produce something that will raise the average.

O. E. DENNISON.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

8-15

Looking Ahead!

CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

comes back again with his latest novel

Gone North

A great story of the Canadian North Country—replete with action and thrills

THEODORE ROSCOE

gives us a colorful complete novelette of stirring adventure in far-off Cambodia—

The Blue Cat of Buddha

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

contributes another of his curious "whispering" stories—right from the desert—

Fall Guy

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF MARCH 22nd

glory. show will be on.

Society Girl Wants A New Name

through the greater part of it and are about to enter upon a more or less prolonged period of quiescence, preparatory to a recovery.

"The causes of the depression are universal character, namely,

Social Position Demands Change In Name As Popular Beauty's Photo Appears In National Advertising

CINCINNATI, Ohio (Tuesday)—Few people dodge fame, yet that is the wish of a local debutante whose photo has recently is to be featured in national magazines throughout America. A large cash prize is to be given the person suggesting the name which will be featured with the photograph

Give This Girl a Name

This popular and beautiful society girl has been chosen to sponsor a line of nationally sold Beauty Preparations. Because of her social position she must use another name. Suggest a winning name for her—*a first and last name*—and win a cash prize. Just some simple name that is easy to say and easy to remember.

We Will Pay $250.00 Just for a Girl's Name

COSTS NOTHING TO WIN

Nothing to Buy—Nothing to Sell—No Puzzles, "Lucky Numbers" or "Guessing Contests" to Win This Cash Prize

JUST SUGGEST A GIRL'S NAME

Here's an amazing opportunity to win a big cash prize for just a moments time. Simply send us a name for this beautiful society girl—a name that you think would sound nice in a Magazine advertisement. We have chosen this society girl to sponsor a new line of Beauty Preparations. Her picture will appear in our advertisements. But because of her social position she cannot use her real name. We are going to pay a big cash prize just for a winning name. Think of a name—send it to us TODAY—Win $250.00 cash and qualify for *an opportunity to win further prizes of $2,600.00 or Buick 8 Cylinder Sedan and $1,100.00 Cash for promptness* in the simple way we show you. See rules below.

YOU CAN'T LOSE

Nothing to lose—costs nothing to win. It is easy to think of a name. Some name that may flash into your mind this very instant may win the prize. Just some simple name like Helen Miller or Mary Lee may be chosen as the prize winner. Don't let this opportunity slip through your fingers. Think of a name NOW—send it TODAY.

JUST SENDING A NAME QUALIFIES YOU FOR OPPORTUNITY TO

Win $2,600.00 *or* Buick 8 Sedan

and $1,100.00 *for* Promptness

This huge prize is *Extra* and *in addition* to the cash prize for the Society Girl's name. No wonder we say that here is your opportunity to win a fortune. Think of it! $2,600.00 all cash or a big Buick 8 cylinder Sedan and $1,100.00 in cash besides—all coming to you at once! Many work a lifetime without ever getting together such a magnificent sum. Hundreds of prizes—over $4,300.00 in cash will be given in this huge prize distribution. Some yet unknown person is going to win a fortune—why not you? You have just as good a chance as anyone. *Every single person who takes an active part will be rewarded in cash.* Just send a name suggestion to qualify for this opportunity of a lifetime—nothing more to do to qualify. But act at once—remember $1,100.00 Extra is given for promptness.

SEND NO MONEY You don't have to send any money, you don't have to buy anything or sell anything to win the Name Prize. Just send the first name you think of—it may be a winner—it has just as good a chance as any. But do it NOW! Rush letter with name suggestion or send coupon at once. I will answer at once giving you all the details and telling you just how you stand in the distribution of $4,300.00 cash prizes. Here may be the means of making you financially independent for life.

TED ADAMS, Manager

906 Sycamore St. Dept. 915-H H Cincinnati, Ohio

NAMING CONTEST RULES

Contest open to everyone except employees of our company. Only one name may be submitted. Sending more than one name will cause all names sent by you to be thrown out. Prize of $250.00 will be awarded to one name of all those submitted. In case of duplicate winning names, duplicate prizes will be given. Contest closes October 15, 1931. Every person sending name qualifies for opportunity to win $2,600.00 or Buick 8 Sedan and $1,100.00 cash for promptness. Use the coupon or write letter for all details.

COUPON

TED ADAMS, Manager
906 Sycamore St., Dept. 915-H H, Cincinnati, Ohio

My suggestion for the Society Girl's Name is:....

.....

My Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

I am interested in winning $2,600.00. Rush me all information and tell me how I stand.

Of course CAMELS are milder
THEY'RE FRESH!

HAVE you noticed how women everywhere are switching to the fresh mildness of Camels? Always a great favorite with the ladies, this famous blend is more popular now than ever, since the introduction of the new Humidor Pack.

If you need to be convinced, make this simple test yourself between a humidor fresh Camel and any other cigarette:

First, inhale the cool fragrant smoke of a perfectly conditioned Camel and note how easy it is to the throat.

Next, inhale the hot, brackish smoke of a parched dry cigarette and feel that sharp stinging sensation on the membrane.

The air-sealed Humidor Pack keeps all the rare flavor and aroma in and prevents the precious natural tobacco moisture from drying out. Important too, it protects the cigarette from dust and germs.

Switch to Camel freshness and mildness for one whole day, then leave them —if you can.

● *It is the mark of a considerate hostess, by means of the Humidor Pack, to "Serve a fresh cigarette." Buy Camels by the carton — this cigarette will remain fresh in your home and office*

CAMELS

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